ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

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No. 123 NEW YORK, AUGUST 25, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

KING OF THE WILD WEST'S NERVE

or Stella in the Saddle

Stella leaped from her pony's back, and as Ted reeled and was about to fall, she sprang into the saddle, caught him and dashed away to safety.

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KING OF THE WILD WEST'S NERVE

OR,

STELLA IN THE SADDLE.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE USURPER IS WARNED.

In the southeast corner of Arizona is the San Simon Valley.

It was the bone of contention between two men who were notable for the difference which existed between them in temperament, character, and methods of living.

These were Captain Henry Foraker, a retired officer of the Union Army, and proprietor of the Big Windmill Ranch, and Don Luis Fernando, formerly of Mexico, who was the owner of the Dos Cabezos Ranch.

The valley is broad and level, and lies on the edge of Mexico, and is hemmed in on all sides by mountains, high and rugged, like a wall built around it for protection, not only from the winds, but from outside interference.

There are several passes into the valley, known to all who are familiar with Arizona, and a great many which have been discovered by chance by scouts, cowmen, and prospectors, and which are secret.

The valley, in itself, is a valuable grazing-ground, through which a number of small tributaries of the White River, which seldom runs dry, and in the hills are a great many springs giving forth a supply of water, even in the most arid seasons.

In the Chi-Ri-Cahua Mountains to the north, and the Pedregosa and Perrilla Mountains to the west, as well as the lesser ranges to the south and east, tradition has given valuable mines of gold and silver.

As a consequence, the mountains are constantly overrun with prospectors of every type.

A tale current in the country in the old days was that to the north of the Pedregosa Mountains was a fabulously rich mine, but, to get to it, one had to cross a hundred miles of terrible, blasting desert, which was well strewn with the bleaching skeletons of horse and man.

While many believed that the mine really existed, others scoffed at it, and said that its existence was a bit of Indian imagination.

Many had sought it, but so far none had found it.

It was known by name "The Phantom Mine," because at one time it was said to be here, and at another there. It was never twice in the same place in the stories of those who told of it.

A good many years ago Captain Foraker, then a young man, had heard the story of The Phantom Mine in faraway Maine, and, being a fellow of adventurous spirit, had gathered together what money he could from the sale of the farm his father had left him, and come West.

For several years he plodded through the mountains, braving death innumerable times from Indians and the desert, snakes of the most venomous description, starvation, thirst, and the bullet and knife of the outlaw.

This had toughened him so that, together with his experience as a soldier, he was able to cope bravely and successfully with anything that fate might bring him against in this dangerous land.

In the course of his wanderings in search of The Phan-

tom Mine, he one day wandered into the San Simon Valley.

He saw it first from a peak of the Pedregosa Mountains, in which he had found himself, after crossing the deadly alkali flats to the north.

He was not, at that time, an experienced cattleman, but he instantly realized that here, if anywhere, was an ideal site for a ranch and range. As he gazed over the thousands of acres of waving grass, ribboned with glistening streams, he saw in imagination the plain dotted with his herds.

In that instant the fever to find The Phantom Mine left him.

He determined to take up the valley and start into the cattle-business, although he did not know exactly how he was going to do it, for his total wealth consisted of a burro, a prospector's outfit of hammer, pick, shovel, and a rude rocker, and about ten days' supplies of food.

That made no difference to Captain Foraker. He trailed across the arid mesas into Tombstone, and there he prevailed upon several men of money to stake him to sufficient funds to take up the valley of San Simon, and to stock it.

Years passed, and he grew richer in herds of cattle and horses. He built for himself a hacienda unequaled in the Southwest, where hospitality was as free as the wind that swept down from the mountains all about him.

He became so successful, through his fair ways of doing business and by treating every one, from peon to capitalist, with the same fairness and uniform courtesy, that every one in Arizona swore by Captain Foraker.

He had married the daughter of General Jiminez, of Mexico, the romance of which, and the dangers through which the captain passed to make the union possible, would make a volume in itself.

The captain was getting well along in years, prosperous, contented, happy in the life he led on the beautiful ranch with his still lovely wife and lovelier daughter, when a cloud came over the border from Mexico.

His troubles started in this manner:

One morning the captain and his daughter, who was called Bonito, had ridden out from the hacienda for a breeze across the prairie.

They rode toward the south.

It was a glorious morning, in the month when the air of an Arizona winter wafted cool and refreshing as they rode rapidly toward it, but which, later, would become sweltering, even in the shade.

Bonita was a most beautiful girl. She had all the natural beauty of her highly bred Mexican mother, mingled with the cooler nature of her Puritan forebears. She was fire and ice at once.

Her mother had the blue-black hair, the richly colored skin, and the deeply languorous black eyes of her race. Her father was as fair as a Norseman, with bright blue eyes, and fair, curling hair, accompanied by a stalwart figure.

Bonita was a strange mixture of the two. She was as fair as she was dark. Her beauty was undeniable, and she was sixteen.

Her mother had taught her all the graces which she herself had learned in the convents and the schools of the City of Mexico, and her father had not been backward in teaching her how to ride, shoot, and hunt the wild animals which infested the mountains by wh. the valley was surrounded.

As a horsewoman, none within many miles could excel Bonita Foraker.

She was a strange admixture of the Spaniard and the Puritan.

The young Spanish dons from over the border had paid constant court to her, but Captain Foraker sent them about their business so gently and ceremoniously that not one held a grudge against him.

There was one suitor for the hand of Bonita who was more persistent than the others, and would not be repulsed.

This was Señor Don Luis Fernando, whose remote ancestor had come to the continent with Cortez. He was immensely rich, and tremendously proud. When he asked for the hand of Señorita Foraker, he felt that there should be no hesitation whatever in the granting of his suit.

Bonita did not like him, and she told her father so, and when Don Luis came for his answer he was given a cold refusal.

Fernando gritted his teeth, and tore his hair, and, as he left the hacienda, he turned and swore, beneath his breath, that he would yet humble it.

Of this, of course, the captain and his daughter knew nothing, and, even if they had, it would have made no difference to them.

The two, father and daughter, were happy in their rides together, and Bonita had no thought for any man save her companion, who, to her, was the greatest hero in the world.

After this, things rested for awhile, and Don Luis w forgotten.

One day the *segundo* of the big herd that was grazing along the Mexican border rode up to the ranch-house, and announced to Captain Foraker that in the night a herd of Mexican cattle had been swum across the Pino River, a comparatively small stream that separated the San Simon Valley from Mexico, and were even now grazing in the lower pastures, under charge of a lot of Mexican vaqueros.

"Perhaps they do not know that they are on our range," said Captain Foraker to the *segundo*. The captain was the easiest man to get along with in Arizona, and never took offense at the acts of his neighbors until he was sure that offense was intended.

If he found that a man had intentionally wronged him, he was as lightning, swift to strike, and as deadly.

"Señor," said the foreman, "I believe they know that they are on our range, and that it is an act of aggression."

"We shall see later. Warn them off, and let it go at that," said the captain, and laid back in his wicker sofa on the broad, shady veranda, and returned to his cigar.

That was one of the unwisest things he had ever done. If he had gone out that day, at the head of his cowboys, who were all Americans, and game for anything, from a dance to a fight, this story would never have been written, for he would have been free of the troubles which his easy-going and generous habits brought to him.

The Mexican cattle strayed, for they had drifted away to the east end of the valley, and were no more to be

seen by the captain's cow-punchers, who thought they had crossed the river again into Mexico.

The morning on which the captain and his daughter rode forth, they journeyed farther than they intended.

During the afternoon they topped a rolling hill, and in the far distance, outlined against the green-wooded sides of the mountains, they saw several long, low adobe houses.

The captain pulled in his horse, and looked in amazement at the spectacle.

He feared that he was either seeing a mirage, or that his eyes were failing him.

"What is that, *carita?*" he said to his daughter, pointing to a white thing in the distance.

"Newly made houses of adobe, father," she answered. "Who could have moved onto our ranch, or did you give permission to the men to build a house there?"

"I know nothing of it," said the captain, with a tremor in his voice. "This is some trickery. Some one is taking advantage of our distances and is squatting on our place, believing that we would not discover them. The ranch is large, but not large enough for two, with their herds. I wonder who it is that has thus encroached upon us?"

"There is room for all, father," said the girl. "We never use the eastern end of the valley, you know. Our herds are not large enough to cover it all."

"That makes no difference," said her father, who was now thoroughly angry. "He should have come to me first and sought a lease, which I might have given him. But he sneaks in like a thief, and steals the better half of my range, which I had reserved for use when the upper pasture gave out."

"But a little grass will do no harm. It is enough that you have the upper end of the valley, and it is doubtful if you ever have enough cattle to cover the place."

"The man is a common thief, or he would not attempt to steal my pasture in this manner!"

"But what can you do about it, father?"

"I shall tell him to move away, and if he does not——"

"What will you do, señor?"

A quiet, sneering voice behind them caused them to whirl, and they beheld before them the handsome Don Luis Fernando.

"What are you doing here on my land?" asked the captain.

"Pardon me, but this is my land, and I should like to know why you are trespassing on it?"

"Nonsense!" said Captain Foraker. "This land is mine by patent from the government!"

"I know your patent by heart," said Fernando. "I have employed the greatest legal talent in Arizona to inform me as to its title. I find that I have as good a right to it as you, if those gentlemen are to be believed, and I think they are, and so I have taken possession of this part of the valley. I hope we shall be good neighbors."

The insolence in the tones of Fernando's voice roused in the captain a rage that was entirely contrary to his natural disposition.

He was about to launch upon the Mexican a torrent of abuse, when he caught his daughter's eye.

Instead of saying what was on his tongue, he merely said:

"You have taken, or tried to take, a tricky advantage of me, señor, but I shall block your game. You must remove yourself, with your herd and your men, from this valley within twenty-four hours, or I shall be compelled to take steps to drive you out!"

Fernando, who was a strikingly handsome man, dressed in white linen, and apparently as suave and polite as a courtier, flushed deeply, and tried to keep back the flow of language that rose to his lips, but he could not talk for several minutes.

Fernando looked around upon the numbers on his own side, a lot of touting, drinking, smoking thugs whom he had picked out in the purlieus of Tombstone and other New Mexico towns, more for their fighting ability than for what they knew about the cattle-business, in order to back himself up in this bluff to wrest half of the Big Windmill Ranch from the man who had scorned him when he came to ask an alliance with his daughter.

"If you do not go peaceably, I shall have to drive you out, señor," said the captain.

"Might makes right, señor," said Fernando, with a polite smile and a flash of his white teeth.

"In your philosophy, perhaps it does; but, nevertheless, I can assure you that this time justice will conquer. Again I tell you to go."

"Come what will—I remain!" answered Fernando, as, with a mocking smile and a sweep of his sombrero, he turned his horse and rode rapidly away.

CHAPTER II.

A CALL TO SERVICE.

That was the beginning of what became known in the history of Arizona as the San Simon cattle-war, in which many men lost their lives, and which divided the Territory into two factions for a long time.

The war began almost immediately after the meeting between Captain Foraker and Don Fernando.

Captain Foraker was a man of his word. He had given Fernando twenty-four hours in which to remove himself from the valley. Fernando did not go.

At the expiration of the allotted time, a body of Captain Foraker's cow-punchers, led by the captain himself, went to the eastern end of the valley.

They found the adobe houses deserted, with the exception of a cook and two or three servants, whom they chased away. In the course of a few hours they demolished the houses, and burned the ruins and their contents.

As they were returning to the ranch-house, they came across a herd of Fernando's cattle, in charge of a band of American and Mexican cowboys.

A fight took place, in which the Foraker men were triumphant, and the cattle were stampeded and driven into the Pino River, many of them being drowned, and the whole herd badly scattered.

That started it, and for almost a year there was intermittent fighting between the forces of the two chiefs.

Fernando, under guard of about a hundred men, had returned to the valley, and built a new house of rock taken from the mountainside.

It was a castle for strength, and was built to resist the attack of a large body of men. It was one of the most ingeniously constructed houses in the Southwest, and had many underground passages and means of defense not thought necessary in houses in these days of peace.

It was a feudal castle in construction, and all it lacked

was a moat and a draw-bridge to complete the picture of one of the old fortified strongholds of England and Germany.

At the same time, Fernando moved several herds of cattle into the valley, and with them a large number of men—Mexicans to herd the stock, Americans to guard his stolen building.

Captain Foraker had gone to Washington to seek to protect his interests by law, but was given little encouragement.

He was told that the federal authorities could not send troops to his aid, and that, while he had a right to the valley, he would have to defend that right himself.

The territorial authorities gave him the same information, and when he returned home he said to himself:

"I have done all I could to settle this thing by law, and peacefully, but now it is war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt!"

It was a case of fight from now on, as if a feudal lord of the old time, finding his lands invaded by his enemy, called to him his men and went out to battle.

For almost a year the war had been on, and Captain Foraker had been beaten almost every time, because he was not used to guerrilla warfare, and did not resort to the tactics of Fernando and his lieutenants.

Fernando had surrounded himself with a band of the worst men that Arizona, New Mexico, and his own country could produce.

They held the whole country in terror, and had gradually encroached upon the captain's upper valley until they had well-nigh crowded him out.

Fernando himself was seldom seen.

The battles occurred between the men when they met on the range.

Fernando's men made raids on the Foraker herds, and drove off many head of cattle in the night, often leaving behind them a dead cowboy.

As a result of the activity of Fernando's men, the forces at the Big Windmill Ranch had become demoralized. Men deserted in the night, and it was difficult to keep a force there.

Unlike Fernando, Captain Foraker did not hire professional thugs, and men of that class. He would have none but decent men about him.

But things had got to such a pass that he realized that there must be a radical change.

He must make a stand that would be final, and either drive Fernando from the valley or leave it himself. It was not large enough to hold them both.

The Mexican was slowly closing in upon him, and would soon have his ranch-house.

In fact, the Mexican herds were grazing within a mile of his house, while his own cattle were being huddled into the hills to the west.

It must not be inferred from this that Captain Foraker lacked the nerve to fight for his rights. Rather, he was disposed to give his adversary as fair a chance as he would desire himself, and when his patience was exhausted he would strike.

He saw that he was being beaten inch by inch because he was a fair fighter and did not employ the tactics of Fernando.

One evening he was sitting on the veranda pulling moodily on a cigar, when his daughter Bonito came out of the house.

"What is the matter, father?" asked the girl. "Brooding over the invaders? Why don't you change your tactics, and become the aggressor?"

"I was just thinking of that, *carita*," said Captain Foraker.

"Go for them, father," said the girl. "Drive them over the border, and keep them there."

"If only I could get a decent force of men I would do so," said the captain. "But I will never consent to employ a lot of scurvy cutthroats from the slums of the cities, such as he has about him. I wouldn't have them on the place."

"I agree with you, father," said Bonita. "But what are you going to do? Something you must do, and that soon, or they will sweep us out of our home. My dear old dad, you are too easy and gentle. Why don't you go after them tooth and toe-nail, as we used to say when I was a child. I wish I were a boy, instead of a useless girl, I would be of some assistance to you then instead of being a drag."

"Tut! tut!" said the captain, sitting up suddenly. "Say, Bonita, I have an idea."

"Good," laughed his daughter. "I see that I have roused you. What is it? Shall I don men's attire and go forth as your son, and help fight your enemies?"

Her father looked at her sharply, but made no reply.

Bonita was tall for a woman of the Southwest, and larger than most girls of her age. The exercise which she had always taken with her father had developed her figure, and she was as fine a type of American womanhood as one could find anywhere.

"I wish I had a boy like you," said the captain, "but, *carita*, you have been more to me than any son could have been, and I wouldn't have you anything but what you are. But—a boy could fight, couldn't he?"

"Of course, father, a boy can fight," she replied, with a little catch in her voice. "But I think girls can fight sometimes, also, don't you?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said the captain absently. He was trying to think a way out of his difficulties.

Bonita, leaning against a post of the veranda, was also lost in thought. She was trying to help her father evolve a plan by which the enemy could be driven from their valley, which had been so peaceful and happy until the Mexican and his roistering men had come.

Suddenly she stamped her foot and snapped her fingers, a way she had when she had a good idea, or when she was suddenly pleased.

Her father looked up.

"What is it, *carita*?" he asked.

"*Padre mio*," she said. "Do you remember that young man we met in Phœnix several months ago?"

"What young man? We met several young men, if I am not mistaken. There are plenty of young men everywhere," he said, looking slyly out of the corner of his eye at his daughter.

"True," she said, with a toss of her head, "but they are nearly all alike. This one, to whom I refer, was different."

"Who was he, and what was he like? I should remember him if he was different from the others."

"We met him in the hotel for a moment only. A strong young fellow, who wore a suit of khaki, and who was at the head of a band of young fellows like himself. He was a deputy United States marshal, or something of the sort. Don't you remember him now?"

"Of course," said the captain enthusiastically. "Let me see, what was his name? You mentioned it."

"I do not even know it."

"It was—Strong, that is it, and he looked his name all over. But why did you speak of him? I had forgotten him."

"Father, why don't you send for him to come and help you out of your troubles?"

Captain Foraker leaped from his chair.

"Bonita, you are worth two sons," he said. "It takes a woman's wit to think of the right thing. But—I don't know where to find him, or if he would come if I sent for him."

"I remember where he lives," said the girl. "He told me about his ranch in the Black Hills, and about his work there. His address is Soldier Butte, South Dakota. Why don't you telegraph him, and ask him to come to us and bring his young rough riders?"

"I will," said the captain.

He went into the house, and soon came out with a telegram, which he sent to the nearest town by a cowboy.

That night Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, sitting on the veranda of the Moon Valley Ranch, saw a messenger dash across the valley, and soon he had the captain's telegram in his hand.

The boys were in the living-room, and there he went to read the message.

"In demand again, fellows," he said, with a laugh. "Here is a telegram from Arizona calling us to duty."

"Read it," said Ben Tremont.

"All right," said Ted. "But it is pretty indefinite, and I don't know who it is from. I can't seem to place the man at all. It is from Captain Foraker of the Big Windmill Ranch. Do any of you remember him?"

"I shore do," said Bud. "Don't you mind when we were in Arizona buying that herd fer the Lazy X Ranch, we stopped in Tombstone, an' at ther hotel wuz interdooced ter an ole gentleman named Foraker, who hed ther all-firedest pritty daughter, what went by ther name o' Bonito?"

"Yes, yes, I remember him now," said Ted. "He had bunch of yearlings and two-year-olds to sell, and we were too late."

"Thet thar's ther dope. What erbout him?"

"Here's his telegram. I hardly know what to do about it, but I suppose we ought to go to his assistance. We've about cleaned things up here."

"Shorest thing yer know. But read ther telegram, an' we can soon tell what ther is in it."

"Here goes: 'Can you bring your young rough riders here at once, to help me clear my ranch of a body of invaders from Mexico? I cannot rely on men I am able to get here. Would like to put you in charge of the situation. Please answer at once.'"

"Somewhat indefinite," said Ben Tremont. "But I remember his daughter. Bonita, her name was, and she was a mighty fine girl. I vote that we take a chance and go."

"He seems to be in a hurry," said Ted. "And if he has a gang of Mexicans to battle with, I guess he has his hands full. As I remember it, he is close to the Mexican line."

"Thet thar's ther truth," said Bud. "I know ther place. His ranch is in ther San Simon Valley, an' he's a good squar' man. I hear tell o' him many's ther time."

"Well, it looks like business for us," said Ted. "Shall we go?"

"Shore thing, ez far as I'm concerned," said Bud.

"Of course we'll go," shouted the boys.

And that was the way the young rough riders were drawn into the San Simon cattle-war.

CHAPTER III.

TED MEETS SENOR FERNANDO.

It was almost a week after the receipt of Captain Foraker's letter that the young rough riders, accompanied by Mrs. Graham and Stella, arrived in Tombstone, Arizona, and were quartered in the hotel.

"I'm going to the station to see about the arrival of our car-load of ponies," said Ted, after they had breakfasted.

"When will you be back?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"Why?" asked Ted, smiling.

"I want Stella to go out shopping with me, and I would like to know when we must get back, for I presume you mean to start for the Big Windmill Ranch as soon as possible."

"That was my intention."

"How are we going to travel? On the train?"

Ted laughed.

"No; we will have to ride there. This is the nearest railroad-station. If the horses have arrived, we will start as soon as your shopping is done and we can get our camp-supplies together."

"Very well; then Stella and I will hurry with our business and be back here soon."

Ted left Mrs. Graham and Stella, who went to their rooms to get ready to go out.

As Ted passed out of the hotel, he noticed a tall, handsome man standing by the door.

He did not know exactly why he did so, but he took a close look at him as he passed by.

The man was tall and dark, and wore a small black mustache. As he parted his lips, Ted observed that he had beautiful teeth.

There was something foreign about him, as if he might be French or Spanish. He was expensively dressed, and wore a ring with a huge emerald in it on one of the fingers of his left hand.

Ted took in all these details, and many more, in one swift and comprehensive glance.

With the wonderful intuition which he possessed, he felt a sudden distrust of the man, and felt, without knowing why, that he was to come into the affairs of the boys in an unpleasant manner.

He was almost to the railroad-station when he looked behind and saw the man following in his wake in a leisurely manner.

The man was apparently unconscious of Ted's very existence, and was smoking a cigarette. Between puffs of smoke he whistled the air of a popular song.

Ted went into the station, and was engaged in asking the railroad agent about his car-load of ponies, when he felt the presence of the stranger.

"I have got a telegram from down the line that the car will not be here until some time to-night," the agent

was saying to Ted. "I suppose those are the horses consigned to Ted Strong, in care of Captain Foraker."

"Yes," replied Ted. "I sent them that way so that they would be sure to get good care in case I was not here when they arrived. I knew that Captain Foraker was probably well known here, while I was not."

"Captain Foraker is well known," said the agent. "But if you are Ted Strong you are known also, in this part of Arizona, at least."

Ted bowed in acknowledgment, and turned from the window, to see the handsome foreigner looking at him with a sneering smile on his face.

"So this is the celebrated Señor Ted Strong?" he asked.

"My name is Strong," said Ted, a little nettled at the man's tone.

"And I suppose you are going out to the Big Windmill Ranch?"

"I hardly see how my movements can concern you," said Ted, moving away.

"Indeed. You do not. But if you are going to Captain Foraker they do concern me, and I shall make them concern me more."

"Explain yourself, sir," said Ted. "Both your words and the tone in which they are spoken are insulting."

"They were not meant to be; but if you choose to take them so, let it remain that way. I shall not take the pains to moderate them."

"What is the meaning of this? I do not know you."

"You will know me sooner than you desire, for by going to the assistance of Captain Foraker, as I know is your purpose, you are making yourself my enemy."

"I am still in the dark, for, as yet, I know little or nothing of Captain Foraker's purpose in sending for me and my friends."

"Then I will tell you. Captain Foraker has sent for you to fight me. I have taken from him a part of the San Simon Valley, all of which he claimed. I found that I had as good a right to it as he, and that it was merely a case of the strongest as to which of us could hold it. I have proved the stronger, and I mean to take it all. My herds are getting too large to find range on less than all of it."

The man was smiling contemptuously into Ted's face.

"You have a mighty good opinion of yourself," said Ted, smiling also.

"I have," was the reply. "I am the most powerful man in this part of the country. I would advise you to go back whence you came. If you try to interfere with me it will be a sorry day for you."

"See here, Mr. Whoever-you-are——"

"Señor Fernando."

"Your name makes no difference to me," continued Ted. "The first thing for you to understand in this acquaintance which you have forced upon me, is that I am the hardest proposition you ever met when it comes to bluff. I will not be bluffed. And, as for your being the most powerful man in this or any other country, you look just like any other Mexican to me, and I want you to step out of my sunlight. I'm getting cold feet."

Don Fernando did not move.

He was directly in front of Ted, who, in order to leave the station, would have to walk around the Spaniard and a large square post that stood to his left, and squeeze between it and the wall.

This he did not intend to do.

The station-agent was looking anxiously through the wicket of his office. He did not want a quarrel started in the station.

Several men had entered the station during the foregoing conversation, and, attracted to the spot by Ted's demand, stood looking at the two.

They were staring at one another.

Fernando flushed with rage at Ted's demand, but evidently did not intend to regard it.

Ted's face was growing stern, and any one who knew him well would have read the danger-signals in it.

"Will you step aside and let me pass?" asked Ted again.

"A Fernando steps aside for no cursed American," he said, with a nasty little laugh.

"Then he'll be thrown out of the way," said Ted, as he reached swiftly forward and, grasping Fernando by the collar, whipped him off to one side.

Fernando staggered for a moment, but recovered himself and, with a curse and a cry of rage, sprang after Ted, who was walking toward the door.

The station agent gave a shout of alarm.

"Look out, Mr. Strong!" he cried.

Ted turned in time to see Fernando come toward him with a dagger in his hand, which was lifted high above his head.

Had Ted delayed a moment the knife would have been plunged into his back.

But the station-agent had saved him.

Stepping swiftly to one side, he drew back his arm, and as the momentum he had gained carried the Mexican past him Ted struck him a blow on the neck that sent him half-way across the room.

At the blow several of the men in the room rushed forward.

They were a part of Fernando's band of bullies, whom he carried with him wherever he went.

He explained this by saying that he feared assassination at the hands of Captain Foraker's friends or hired men.

There was no grounds for a suspicion of this sort, but it gave him an excuse to have men to do his dirty work whenever it should be necessary.

Ted was in a corner when this attack was made upon him.

He saw its intent, and realized that he had walked into a trap.

Before he had a chance to defend himself, or had time to draw his six-shooter, a half-dozen men were upon him, and he was knocked down and thrown into the corner.

"Kill the dog," he heard Fernando shout.

He was struggling with the man who was on top of him, and at the same time trying to get his revolver out of his holster, for he knew that if he did not get to his feet soon these brutes would beat and kick him to death.

But he could not get to his revolver, and had been struck so many times that he was almost unconscious.

He was almost in despair of his life when he heard a shout outside the station.

The shout was followed by Bud, who leaped through the doorway.

"Jumpin' sand-hills, what's ther trouble here?" he shouted.

He caught a glimpse of Ted down in the corner surrounded by his assailants.

As he leaped forward he gave the Moon Valley yell, and the next instant the room was full of the boys.

Then happened one of the prettiest fights that ever occurred in Tombstone.

Not a shot was fired, but the boys, led by Bud and Ben, rushed upon Fernando's men, and in less than five minutes had them on the run.

As soon as he could get to his feet, Ted ran toward Fernando, who still had his dagger in his hand.

The Mexican was circling around the fighting crowd, trying to stab one of the boys.

But before he could do this, Ted was upon him. With the handle of his six-shooter Ted hit the Mexican such a blow on the wrist as to cause him to drop the dagger to the floor.

Ted immediately put up his revolver and went at Fernando with his fists.

Fernando was no coward, and evidently he had had some training at boxing. He was an athletic fellow, also, and Ted found, in a very few minutes, that it was not going to be an easy thing to thrash the Mexican.

As they squared off opposite one another, the Mexican had a murderous look in his eyes. He would have killed Ted if he could, but the time was not propitious, and his men were not doing the fighting they should to bring him out victorious.

Fernando was sparring to keep Ted away from him, evidently hoping that his men would come to his aid.

It did not take Ted long to learn his tactics, and he at once became the aggressor.

Ted was leading right along now, and Fernando was backing away, and blocking his blows when he was not dodging them.

Most of his men had run out of the station, having been well thrashed by the boys.

Ted saw that the only way to stop the fight in the station was to make a finish of Fernando, when the others would stop fighting.

He waited for an opening, therefore, and suddenly shot out his left fist.

Fernando tried to block the blow, but he was not fast enough, and it caught him over the heart.

He went down like a log, and his men, seeing that their chief was defeated, ran from the room.

It did not take Fernando long to recover, although he was still weak and dazed when he rose from the floor.

"You are the master at the boxing-game," he said to Ted. "But this is not the end. There are other games which I know better. We will meet in one of them some of these days. But I give you fair warning to keep away from San Simon Valley. I will stand for no interference there. If you go there I will crush you, and make things much worse than they might be for Captain Foraker and his wife and daughter. The next time we meet I shall be the victor, and I shall not spare you."

"I shall not do any worrying about it," said Ted. "But I want you to know that if I find that you are up to any crooked business in San Simon Valley, or anywhere else, I shall stop you."

"See here, my untutored friend from Mexico, I'd advise yer ter take yer bunch o' bum fighters an' go back ter ther land o' ther hidalgos. If they should happen ter meet up with this yere posse ag'in out in ther open, thar won't be no sich easy finish fer you," said Bud.

"Bah!" exclaimed Fernando, with a snap of his fingers.

"What did yer call me?" said Bud, walking toward the Mexican in a menacing manner.

"Never mind him, Bud," said Ted, laughing.

"Bah for all of you," said Fernando angrily. "And for you, Ted Strong, it will be death for you when next we meet."

He strode out of the station, waving his fist excitedly in the air and cursing in Spanish.

"The war is on," said Ted.

"And we are here to fight the battles," said Ben, at which the boys sent up the long yell.

CHAPTER IV.

TED MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

The young rough riders were much elated at their victory over Fernando and his bullies.

They had cause to be, for Fernando's men were the most desperate to be found in the territory, and were feared everywhere.

Fernando himself, as his wealth increased, had become more and more arrogant, so that he had bluffed merchants, bankers, and ranchers into believing that he was invincible.

Thus it was that when Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, came out to Arizona to enter into the San Simon Valley cattle-war, the old-timers simply laughed.

They predicted the speedy annihilation of the young rough riders, and the annexation of the whole San Simon Valley by Fernando.

Ted's reputation was as good as ever in Arizona.

Many people remembered his feats of the past, but they were dazzled by Fernando's successes, and gave him more credit than he was entitled to.

However, Ted was in no wise bluffed by mere words, and he was convinced that Fernando was not such a terrible character as he was credited with being.

Ted had that sort of courage that feared nothing that was not tangible. He was the last person in the world to fear the mere reputation of a so-called "bad man."

He had met many such, and some of them were in prison, and a few were dead.

After the fight in the railroad-station there was nothing to do but wait for the arrival of the car-load of ponies, which the agent had told Ted would arrive that night.

Consequently they all went back to the hotel.

Ted told the boys to amuse themselves as they wished, but to avoid, as far as they could, any collision with Fernando and his men.

When Stella and Mrs. Graham returned from their shopping tour, Ted told them that it would probably be the following day before they could start for the Foraker ranch.

In the meantime, he went out to buy the necessary supplies for their trip across the country.

It was to be a ride of several hundred miles across broad, grassy mesas at the start, then over the terrible alkali flats, arid as the Sahara, and deadlier. After they got across the alkali desert they would have to traverse the mountain passes or climb the steeps.

Ted knew an old prospector in Arizona who was familiar with all the valleys, hills, and mountains in the territory.

As he was walking up the street he happened to think of this character.

If any one could guide the party through the mountains into the San Simon Valley, it would be he.

But to find him was a task of some magnitude. The old fellow might be in Tombstone, or he might be camping in the mountains, or in the desert, still looking for that elusive fortune that might be turned up by the point of a pick at any moment, or might never be found.

The old prospector's name was Bill Blue.

"Ah, *compadre*, how goes it?"

Ted felt a heavy slap on his shoulder as a hearty voice sang out this salutation.

He whirled to look into the merry, bearded face of a man of perhaps fifty years old.

He was a curious character. As he swung his sombrero, a soiled and battered piece of headgear, from his head, and mopped his brow with a red bandanna handkerchief, it could be seen that he was bald on top, but that his hair beneath hung in a grizzled mass over his shoulders.

He was dressed in true Western style. His red shirt was clean, but it was faded from long exposure to the Arizona sun and many washings in mountain streams.

Below his waist he was all leather. His trousers were made of the soft hide of a deer, and sewn with the thongs of the very animal that had furnished the hide. Bill Blue had sewn them together himself out in the rocky hills, using a thorn for a needle.

He had worn them long, and the grease from many camp-fire cookings had changed their color; but they were as tough as iron, and in all the years Blue had worn them they had shown no signs of wear. The bottoms of the legs were tucked into a pair of heavy boots.

Save for a cartridge-belt, a big Colt .44 revolver, and a hunting-knife, this was Bill Blue's sartorial equipment.

There was a broad smile on his face as he extended his hand to Ted.

"Well, by Jove!" said Ted delightedly. "I was just thinking about you, and wondering where I could find you. This is the strangest thing that could have happened. You might as well have been in any other place in the Southwest as here, just where I wanted you to be."

"Jest drapped in, podner," said Bill Blue. "Reckon you ain't heard the news."

"If it is about you, no," answered Ted. "But I surely am mighty glad to see you."

"Same here, kid, I'm tickled to meet up with you again. If you need anything in the way of coin, call on me, for I've shorely got it."

"Strike it good at last?" asked Ted, with a smile, for he knew the history of Bill Blue, which was one of adversity when it came to finding gold, for it was an axiom in Arizona that if there was gold anywhere Bill Blue would be sure to miss it.

"I reckon I have—some. Ever hear of The Phantom Mine?"

Ted nodded, and continued to smile.

"It's mine."

"Great Scott! you don't say so."

"I shore have it."

The old prospector ran his hand into the capacious pocket of his leather breeches, and pulled out a handful of twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"This yere is mere chicken feed," he said. "I brought in enough solid gold on my two burros to keep me a year," he said, laughing. "If you need any or all of it you can have it, kid. I haven't forgotten how you picked me up one time on the Mogollon Mesa when I was all but starved, and staked me to grub and water and sent me on my way rejoicing."

With a wave of the hand Ted dismissed the obligation.

"I don't need anything except your help for a day or two as a guide, Bill," said Ted. "But I'd be obliged to you if you'd give me that."

"I shore will, Ted. There's nothin' I wouldn't do for you, kid. I'll give you The Phantom Mine if you say the word. What is it you want me to do for you?"

"Do you know the San Simon Valley?"

"Do I? Why, boy, The Phantom is within rifle-shot of the valley, and every time I sneak off to it I am within sight of it."

"I and my friends, the young rough riders—you remember them—are on our way there to help Captain Foraker, who owns a ranch in there. I know that there are certain passes into the valley, and that it is easily entered if one knows the way. But I also know what a dangerous thing it is for any one to lose his way in these Arizona mountains."

"It sure is."

"I could think of no one who might be able to guide us into the San Simon, whom I could trust, except you."

"You do me proud, for I shore can do that same."

"That was what I was thinking about when you slapped me on the shoulder. I was just on my way to get supplies for my party. You see, our saddle-stock was shipped by express in a car from our ranch, but they got shut out somewhere, and the car will not be in until to-night."

"I see. Now, what's the stunt?"

"I don't exactly know what is the matter at San Simon Valley, except that a Mexican has usurped the valley from Captain Foraker, who is in trouble, and has sent for the young rough riders to help him out."

"And your right to do it, boy. I've heard something about this fight, although I've paid little attention to it, as I've had plenty of troubles of my own to attend to."

"Then you'll take us in through one of the passes which you know?"

"I will, and do anything else I can."

"Then that settles it."

Ted told Bill Blue of his recent meeting with Fernando, and the outcome of it, and the old man laughed, but suddenly looked serious.

"Say, boy," he said, "we'll have to look out for that fellow if he knows that we are leaving town. He knows all the ways into the valley by this time, and it is certain that he will try to hold us up, and, if his force is large enough, he may do us some harm."

"I am not afraid if they can fight no better than they did a short while ago. The trouble with those fellows, Bill, is that they have nothing to fight for except their pay, while the young rough riders fight for principle always."

"That's the only thing worth fighting for," said the old prospector.

They parted, to meet at the hotel later, and Ted went to one of the big outfitting stores, bought the supplies for their journey, and rented a chuck wagon and a team of mules to accompany them to the ranch.

Meantime, Bud Morgan had gone to the hotel with

the other boys, and then started out to see some of his friends who lived in the town.

He was walking down a side street from the hotel when he heard a scream of almost human agony.

It was as if a child, being tortured, was crying out in pain.

The old cow-puncher half-drew his six-shooter from his pocket and stood alertly, listening for a repetition of the cry.

In a moment it came again.

This time it was closer, and still more agonizing.

While the cry was still ringing in his ears, there dashed around the corner of the street a large yellow cat.

It was on fire, and, as it ran, it was screaming with terror.

Close to Bud was a watering-trough at the edge of the sidewalk, placed there for horses.

As the cat approached him, Bud called to it.

"Kittie! Kittie! Come to me," he said, in a coaxing voice.

The poor tortured creature seemed to recognize a friend in him, and leaped into his arms.

Without hesitation he plunged it into the trough, and immediately extinguished the flames.

He had no sooner done this when a crowd of men and boys dashed around the corner in pursuit of the cat.

The cat was now perched upon his shoulder, and was licking her burns, all the while moaning with the pain they gave her.

The crowd stopped short at the sight.

In the lead was a half-drunken man of huge proportions, and with a brutal, leering face. Bud recognized him instantly as one of Fernando's men. When he saw the cat perched on Bud's shoulder he gave a loud laugh.

"There she is, boys," he shouted. "By heck, the fire is out an' she's alive. Start the conflagration again. We'll burn the whole derned town up yet."

"Not with this cat, yer won't," said Bud. "Say, air yer ther galoot what set this yere cat afire?"

"I air," answered the other.

"What did you do it fer?" asked Bud.

"Jest fer fun. Now, what in ther burnin' flames o' ther lower regions is it to you?"

"Oh, nothin' much, except thet I think ye're ther most ornery, low-lived coyote I erbout ever see, an' I seen some pritty low-down ones in my time. This yere is my cat, see, an' ther man what touches her hez got ter do some awful heavy stunts."

"Sho, thet's my cat," shouted the bully. "I raised her from a kitten, an' I jest poured a little kerosene over her an' set her afire ter make a Roman holiday outer Tombstone. I don't like ther town nohow."

"That's all right," said Bud. "Burn up ther town if ther folks is fools ernough ter let yer, but not this cat any more. You hear me! She's come ter me fer pertection, an' ye bet she gets it."

The cat was sitting on Bud's shoulder, licking her paw and brushing off the singed hair on her face and back.

She had been more frightened than injured, owing to Bud's prompt rescue, and had begun to purr with satisfaction that she was out of danger.

"Let me have thet thar cat," said the bully, approaching Bud.

The crowd behind him, who appeared to be mostly town loafers and bums from the saloons, yelled a demand for the cat.

One or two of the best of the lot protested, and demanded that the cat be turned loose, saying that she had had enough, but the others would hear nothing of the sort, and wanted to set her afire again and make her run the streets.

"Ther first man what goes ter take this yere cat is goin' ter hev ther time o' his life right up ter limit o' my ability," said Bud, looking warily at the crowd.

He knew that he could not thrash them all, but he thought that he saw among them several who would come to his assistance when it came to a fight.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth when the big bully who had claimed the cat rushed upon him.

The attack was unexpected by Bud, but he managed to brace himself against it. The cat was quicker, and as the bully grappled with Bud his hat went off and the cat leaped from Bud's shoulder to his scalp, and began to claw it savagely.

The bully yelled in agony, and tried to release his hold on Bud to get at the cat, but Bud would not permit him to do so.

At the sight of the cat clawing its old enemy, the crowd, which had at first been inclined to rush in to attack Bud and make a quick finish of him, began to laugh and applaud both Bud and the cat.

In the meantime, Bud had got a good hold on the bully and was dragging him toward the trough.

When he got him close to it, he bent him over it and threw him in.

The cat leaped back to Bud's shoulder, and sat there licking her paws, while Bud held the brute's head in the dirty water until the bubbles ceased coming to the surface, when he pulled him out and laid him in the road.

"Thar," he said, turning to the mob. "That's yer brave pal what would torture a cat. He ain't fit ter be drowned in water after tryin' ter burn a cat ter death, an' burnin' up ther town. Let him lay in ther dirt whar he belongs. When he comes to, tell him thet if he wants any more o' it ter call at ther American House, at which hotel he'll find a feller whose name is Bud Morgan, what will be glad ter accommodate him ter some more, an' if I ain't thar he'll find several o' my pals what will be glad ter do ther stunt fer me. But ther cat is mine, an' if any other gent in ther crowd thinks he hez a better claim ter it, let him come on."

But no one seemed to want to take the cat from Bud, who walked up the street with the poor singed animal purring away contentedly on his shoulder.

CHAPTER V.

NIMROD'S BATTLE.

The car-load of ponies, having arrived on the night train, were unloaded by the boys and placed in a corral to rest and feed, and in the morning everything was ready for the ride to the San Simon Valley Ranch.

Ted had brought Sultan for himself, and Calamity Jane for Stella, and each of the boys had his favorite saddler in the herd, so they were all well mounted.

Bill Blue was at the hotel at an early hour, mounted on a little flea-bitten cayuse which he had managed to pick up, and followed by his two burros, Tom and Jerry, with packs on their backs.

The old prospector intended to go to The Phantom Mine as soon as he had guided the boys into the valley.

Mrs. Graham, as usual, preferred a seat in the wagon to a saddle, but Stella rode out in advance of the cavalcade with Ted and Bud.

Bill Blue was with them also, and made the time pass swiftly with stories of his adventures with the Indians while on his lonely expeditions through the savage mountains and inhospitable deserts, which he had traversed for years.

The first night out from Tombstone they camped in the foot-hills of the Dragoon Mountains.

They began then to realize that they were in a country more savage than any they had ever traversed before.

As the sun sank behind the mountains, the peaks were lighted up with fires that were almost unearthly. The rigid and barren mountain tops stood out against the red sky like grim sentinels, and everywhere the landscape presented the appearance of desolation and barrenness.

There was no water to be found, and had they not provided for such an emergency by having a barrel of it in the wagon, they would have suffered for the life-giving fluid.

"It's a long way to water from here," said Bill Blue, as they retired for the night.

"Where is the next water?" asked Ted.

"Lost Spring Pass," answered the old prospector.

"But I was told in Tombstone that no one knew where the lost spring was, and that there were very few springs this side of San Simon Valley."

"That's what the tenderfeet in Tombstone think," said Blue, "but, besides finding The Phantom Mine, I also discovered the lost spring. I don't think any one except myself and a few Indians know its whereabouts."

"Then we will be safe, so far as water is concerned?"

"Sure. If we get that far, we will find the spring."

The night passed quietly, save for the occasional howls of the wolves that infested the valleys and mountain-sides, and the occasional scream of a panther which slipped down the mountain and smelled the ponies, which, however, were safe in a rope corral, guarded by relays of the boys.

The next day they passed the Dragoon Mountains and struck into the desert, where they camped the next night, and the following day they entered the Lost Spring Pass.

So far their trip had been without event, except that they had been on short rations of water, as that in the barrel had been almost exhausted, because they had to share it with their animals, and, as a matter of fact, all the boys had gone without it rather than deprive their ponies of it.

Bill Blue led the way without hesitation into the pass which led to the San Simon Valley.

"When we get through this pass we will be within a mile of the Big Windmill Ranch-house," said he. "In fact, we will be able to see the house before we are out of the pass."

Late in the afternoon Blue piloted Ted and Bud to the Lost Spring.

This spring had been sought for many years by miners and cattlemen.

Its reputation had gone abroad, and as it was the only known water in the mountains, and was said to be abundant, it was in great demand.

The boys found in it a splendid spring that gushed out of the side of the mountain in a stream as big around as a man's thigh, and disappeared again into the earth after filling and flowing out of a deep basin which it had carved for itself in the rock.

The fact that it found for itself almost immediately a subterranean escape was the reason it had not been sooner discovered.

Pointing to a gray mountain peak in the distance, Bill Blue said to Ted:

"See yon peak?"

Ted nodded his head for reply.

"That's Sheridan's Peak. In that dark rift, which you see to the north, is the trail that leads to The Phantom Mine, boy. It's the hardest trail to find and follow in the West, but at the end of it is the richest mine in Arizona, and only Bill Blue knows how to get there."

"Why do you tell me this, Bill?" asked Ted.

"Because I want you to know where it is. Some day I may want you to come and find it—and me."

At the time Ted paid no attention to this, but later he was to think of it, when he had almost forgotten the mountain.

The ponies were tired with their thirsty journey across the desert, and Ted decided to spend a day or two at the spring in order to give them a chance to recover.

The boys were glad of the rest also, for the way had been hot, and they had breathed alkali dust until their throats and mouths were raw.

They had all deprived themselves of water on their tedious desert journey in order that Mrs. Graham and Stella might have all they needed.

The pass in which they were was very narrow, and walled in by precipitous cliffs. The lost spring was situated at the end of a box cañon, the entrance to which was so carefully concealed by nature that one could not have found it unless he accidentally stumbled onto it, as Bill Blue had in one of his prospecting trips, when he was at the point of death from thirst.

Probably it was this fact that led to its discovery, for the instinct of a dying man had led him to it.

The pass itself was so obscure that it was known to only a few, and as none of these had discovered the spring it was shunned, so that it was seldom if ever used even by those, which included a few roving bands of Indians.

The first day and night in camp at the spring was spent happily by the boys.

They made the pass echo and reecho with the reports of their revolvers as they indulged in pistol-practise for prizes, and in listening to Bill Blue's yarns.

The cat, which Bud had rescued from the town loafers in Tombstone, would not be separated from him.

Wherever Bud went there the cat was also. Even while he was shooting at the target it was perched upon his shoulder.

It was rapidly recovering from its burns under the ministrations of Stella, who found in her traveling-bag some soothing salve which she rubbed on the animal's sores.

As the cat recovered it amused the whole camp with its antics. At night it curled itself up on top of Bud, as if to protect him, and slept the night through.

Ted had given the cat the name of Nimrod, because of its ability to hunt.

It was continually bringing into camp all sorts of small animals, which had escaped the observation of even such sharp eyes as those possessed by Ted.

Gophers and ground-squirrels, small birds, and even

horned toads were its prey, which it proudly laid at Bud's feet as if it were repaying him in a measure for his friendship and protection.

The only drawback to their stay in the valley at this time was the large number of rattlesnakes there.

They were a constant source of terror to Mrs. Graham and Stella, and the boys made war on them, but it was Nimrod who did more execution than any of them.

They were all used to Nimrod's prowess as a gopher and rabbit hunter, but they did not know of his ability as a serpent-destroyer until he saved Bud's life.

It was Nimrod's habit of sleeping curled up on Bud that gave him the opportunity of his life, and enabled him to repay Bud for saving him.

Ted, who was a light sleeper, was awakened early one morning by hearing an ominous burr not far away.

It was just daylight, and he raised his head slightly and looked around.

About ten feet away was one of the largest rattlesnakes he had ever seen gliding toward Bud, who was sleeping. Nimrod heard the noise also, and was alert in a moment.

Ted watched the cat with interest to see what it would do, but he took the precaution to draw his six-shooter, with the intention of killing the snake if it should get too close to Bud.

Nimrod raised himself cautiously from Bud, the hair on his back bristling, and his tail swelling with anger.

The cat's eyes shone like two yellow suns, and his whiskers bristled as he crouched close to the ground, his body writhing.

Ted had often read of the tactics employed by the tigers of India when seeking their prey, and Nimrod followed the same motions as he had seen described.

Ted looked from the cat to the snake.

It had instantly recognized a deadly and dangerous enemy in the cat.

It had stopped gliding, and was coiling itself for defense.

His ugly, flat head, perched on the tapering, mottled neck, was weaving to and fro, reared aloft.

From between his scaly jaws protruded a little black tongue which shook and quivered steadily.

Its tail was elevated above the fold of its body, and the rattles were going steadily, like the roll of a small drum.

The snake was at bay and getting ready for a desperate fight.

Ted watched it with fascinated interest. It had all the devilish aspect of the infuriated serpent.

He wondered what Nimrod would do, and looked at the cat.

Nimrod was about five feet from the snake, crouched on the ground, his ears lying flat against his head, and his watchful eyes trained on the swaying head of his enemy.

His writhing body was moving almost imperceptibly closer and closer to the snake.

He had advanced so about a foot when he stopped once more, and the enemies regarded one another intently, each moving in in its own particular way, the snake's head weaving slowly back and forth, and its tongue flashing in and out, while its dull, cold eyes never left the blazing orbs of the cat.

Slowly Nimrod advanced another foot, and again he crouched upon the ground. His tail was waving above his back, and the snake's head weaved in unison with it.

It seemed to Ted that the cat was charming the snake by the motion of its tail.

For several minutes this fascinating occupation kept up, and Nimrod advanced another foot, a little swifter than before and with long, creeping movements of his fore feet.

Meantime, the snake kept rattling incessantly, not with a loud noise, but rather with a sort of subdued burr, as of a drum in the distance, which was being rapidly beaten.

As the cat went forward its tail never ceased its waving, and the snake's head continued to sway, following faithfully the monotonous motion.

But suddenly there was more action.

Ted saw a smudge of gray shoot through the air.

It was Nimrod, springing on his prey.

There was an angry cry, as Nimrod shot through the air.

Ted was fearful for the safety of the cat, as he knew the courage of the Arizona rattler, and the deadly effect of its fangs.

He half-raised himself to fire at the snake, but all he could see was a rolling, tumbling mass on the rocks.

For several moments he could hardly distinguish which was the snake and which the cat, so incredibly swift were their movements.

Suddenly Nimrod straightened up, and hanging from his mouth was a dead rattler about four feet long, and with fourteen buttons on his tail.

Nimrod was strutting along with it with head and tail erect, very proud of his catch, which he dragged to where Bud was sleeping, and laid the dead reptile at his feet.

A shout from Ted aroused the camp, and when Ted told the story of Nimrod's feat the cat came in for a great deal of petting.

At a signal from Bud he leaped to the old cowpuncher's shoulder, to be praised and caressed.

"I move we elect Nimrod an honorary member of the young rough riders," said Ben Tremont. "He certainly seems to be eligible."

"Yer shore right," said Bud. "This yer feline is my ole side kick, an' he goes back with me ter Moon Valley ter stay ez long as he wants ter."

CHAPTER VI.

TED'S WILD RIDE.

"I think we might as well pull out of here to-day," said the King of the Wild West after breakfast.

As this was agreeable to the others, preparations were made to break camp.

A barrel of water was taken from the spring, and saddles were thrown on the ponies' backs.

"I'm going to ride ahead a bit, to scout the way," said Ted, who, as usual, was the first to be saddled and ready to be off.

He waved his hand to the others and started on a lope down the pass.

The others took their time, knowing that he would wait for them or that they would meet him returning to them when he had completed his investigation.

The pass was winding and narrow, and ascended gradually after the spring was passed, and Ted followed it

rapidly until he came to a point where it suddenly opened out into a sort of amphitheater, from where he could look down into San Simon Valley.

He could see the white ranch-house and other buildings of Captain Foraker, surrounded by trees and a large garden, and numerous herds of cattle grazing here and there.

Against the dark range of mountains that hemmed in the valley to the east he was able, with the aid of his field-glasses, to distinguish the white house of Don Fernando.

The valley was a beautiful sight as he sat on his horse looking at it in the fresh light of the morning.

It seemed to him to be well worth fighting for, and he was glad that he was to be instrumental in saving it for the man whose enterprise had turned it from a wilderness into a prosperous ranch.

While he was watching it he heard a noise to his left, and looked around.

A file of horsemen were coming from behind the shelter of the rocky wall of the amphitheater. They were dressed like cowboys, but in the lead was a man in the costume worn by the better class of Mexicans.

Ted could see the flash of silver on the housings of his saddle and bridle, and a glint of it on the steeple-crowned hat he wore.

From this distance he could not distinguish the features of the men, but supposed that they were probably some of Captain Foraker's cow-punchers come out to meet the rough riders, and guide them to the ranch.

He rode slowly toward them for this reason, and when he had gone several hundred yards he was able to see that the man in the lead was none other than his new-made enemy, Don Fernando.

Ted realized instantly that he was at a great disadvantage.

He was far from his comrades, and Fernando was practically on his own ground, and surrounded by his followers.

What to do was the question that flashed through his mind.

To turn tail and run might have saved him, but he did not want to do this.

He saw that he was in a trap, and now he could see that Fernando was laughing and talking to his men.

Evidently he realized as well as Ted that the latter had fallen into a trap, and he meant to take advantage of it.

As he spoke to his men he raised his hand, and they spurred their horses into a faster pace.

Observing this, Ted rode out toward the left in order to avoid riding straight toward them and meeting them.

As he did so, Fernando changed his course, and swung his men in the direction in which Ted was riding.

Ted rapidly released his revolver in its holster, for he saw that he probably would have to fight.

Ted gave the spur to his pony, and rode rapidly around the approaching horsemen.

He saw Fernando draw a silver-mounted revolver from his belt, and hold it in readiness to fire.

Ted believed that the Mexican don was a fighter with a knife, as so many of his countrymen are, and that he was not, therefore, a very good shot with the revolver, but he was so greatly outnumbered that he knew he had only a faint chance with Fernando if it came to a fight.

This he hoped to avoid if he could.

As he appeared to pay no attention to Fernando the latter at last reined in, and signaled his followers to stop.

With mock courtesy he lifted his sombrero to Ted, and with a sweep of it and a sneering smile, he said:

"Welcome to our country, señor. Will you not join our cavalcade and accompany us to my poor house, where I should be glad to be your host for an indefinite time."

"I suppose that means that you wish to make me your prisoner," said Ted, who had halted his pony, and sat with his revolver in his hand. "No, thank you. I prefer my liberty. Besides, I have work to do in the San Simon Valley."

Fernando shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will," he said, with the same insulting smile. "But I think your fate as a guest in my house, even if you prefer to call yourself a 'prisoner'—the word is not mine—would be better than that which awaits you if you insist upon joining the forces of Captain Foraker."

"I don't know what fate you have in store for me," said Ted, with a short laugh, "but no matter how hard it might be it would be preferable to being housed with you when I know that you are a trespasser on the land of the man who has called upon me to aid him in ridding himself of an impudent usurper."

"Fine talk, my boy, but when you see what is to be your fate you will be sorry that you do not consent to be my guest."

"If that is all you have to say I will bid you good day. I have more important business than to talk to you about what you know is impossible. I don't want to be your guest, and I will not."

Fernando laughed again, and gave a signal to his men to rush upon Ted.

"I'd advise you not to rush me," shouted Ted. "Some one is likely to be hurt. Keep your distance, and let me go my way."

Fernando did not reply, but he raised his revolver and a ball sung over Ted's head.

At the same moment Ted raised his own revolver, and the next instant Fernando clasped his right arm, and gave a howl of rage and pain.

"Shoot him!" he yelled to his men.

But Ted had wheeled his horse and was off like a shot.

He was followed by a yelling mob of Fernando's men.

Fernando was following in their wake, calling to them to kill Ted, but as yet none had fired at him.

He was fleeing up the pass in the direction from which the boys should be coming toward him, when suddenly his pony stumbled and Ted shot over his head and struck the rocky floor of the pass.

The blow rendered him insensible, and before he recovered he was seized by Fernando's men and carried back over the way they had come.

Ted was lying across the saddle of one of the men, and

the band rode rapidly out of the pass and across the valley.

In less than an hour they reached the house of Fernando.

Ted had recovered, only to find himself bound.

When they arrived at the house he was lifted to the ground.

"Now, my chap, you shall see what you will get for not voluntarily coming to my house as my guest," said Fernando. "You would have been well treated, but now you shall get the worst I can think of. I shall have to pay you for the nasty clip in the arm which you gave me, as well as coming here to interfere with my plans. I shall take time to think of something pleasant for you."

Fernando turned away, at the same time calling to his men to see that Ted was held in safe custody.

Ted was conducted into the house, and locked in a room on the first floor, where he was unbound and left to nurse his bruises as best he might.

In the meantime, Fernando was having his wounded arm bound, and when it was done he went to the room in which Ted was sitting waiting for him.

Ted felt that the Mexican would use all the ingenuity of his evil mind to devise a punishment for him that would be as cruel as possible.

It was well into the afternoon when Fernando entered the room, followed by three of his men.

"Secure him, and take him outside," ordered Fernando.

The first man to approach Ted went sprawling into a corner, as the result of a blow on the jaw. The second followed his example, but at a shout from Fernando the room was filled by his men, who ran in and soon overpowered Ted by sheer force of numbers.

"Now we will show you what we can do in the way of punishment of our enemies at Dos Cabezos Ranch," said Fernando. "Drag him out!"

As the Mexican said this there was a smile of triumph on his face. He was suffering severely from the wound in his arm, and had lost his temper completely at Ted's coolness and bravery in the face of his present predicament.

Ted was dragged roughly out of the house, before which two men stood holding a white horse, which struggled to be free.

A rope had been tied around its upper lip, but despite of it it leaped from side to side.

It was as wild a mustang as ever was caught on the plains of Mexico, and had never felt saddle or bridle.

At sight of it Ted guessed his fate.

He was soon to know. He was lifted from the ground and placed upon the back of the plunging beast, and his legs tied around its neck while a rope passed around his body and beneath the horse and tied.

All the while the horse plunged and kicked, squealing like a maddened thing.

When Ted had been securely bound Fernando shouted to his men to release the horse, which one of them did by cutting the rope close to its nose.

The instant it was freed it bounded into the air and came down stiff-legged in an effort to dislodge its unaccustomed burden.

Finding it could not do this, and terrified by its new experience, it turned, and with a wild scream of terror fled into the hills.

Ted was in a terrible predicament. The motion of the horse as it bounded along, bucking and pitching, almost deprived him entirely of breath, and at the same time racked every joint in his body.

The horse was wild with fear, but soon it seemed to grow more accustomed to its burden and ceased to buck, but continued to flee as if it were pursued by a devil.

Ted could stand this better, for he got so he could accustom himself to the motion of the horse.

Over the hills the horse ran, and soon the day was done and night was coming on.

Where the brute was carrying him Ted did not know.

The animal seemed to be tireless. Terror lent speed to its heels, and as it leaped over the ground, occasionally snorting with terror and reaching its head around to bite at Ted's legs in an effort to release itself of him, Ted's experience was sufficiently terrifying.

The ropes had cut through Ted's flesh from the sawing motion caused by the leaps of the horse, and the maddened animal, smelling the blood that flowed from his wounds, became still more terrified.

But now a new terror presented itself. The blood had fallen on the grass of the plain, into which the horse, after crossing the hills, had dashed. It was here that it had been smelled by a pack of wild prairie wolves, already half-famished.

Ted heard the wild cry of the first wolf to pick up the scent of the blood, and shuddered.

The horse heard it also, and it put additional spurt into his heels.

Soon other wolves heard the blood-cry and came running to the chase. The horse was maddened with fear. It was out of the hills, making for the country of the Quaimal Indians.

The animal had been stolen from the Quaimals by one of Fernando's men, and it was returning to the wild herd to which it belonged with unerring instinct.

But it was now beginning to tire from its mad rush over hill and dale, while the wolves in pursuit were apparently as fresh as ever.

While Ted would have been glad to have stopped the horse at the outset of its wild career with him, now he was eager for it not to shirk its pace.

The wolves, running by his side, were leaping at him with foam-flecked jaws, their howls resounding in his

ears, and their nauseating breath turning him sick as it struck his face.

It was the thing for him now to keep the horse going, which he did by his yells, and by pinching and even biting the animal on the flank.

At any moment he expected to feel the fangs of the blood-hungry beasts fasten in his throat. If one had managed in one of its wild leaps to fasten its teeth in him or in the flesh of the horse it would have been all over with them both.

The wolf pack was growing larger all the time as the brutes gathered others to it by their yells.

Ted did not know how it would end, for he could feel the horse beginning to lag beneath him. If it went down or stopped it meant death.

Suddenly the wolves began to drop away, with frightened howls, and Ted felt the tired horse begin to slacken its speed.

Then he heard a familiar cry:

"How coolah!"

A young Indian, feathered and painted, stood beside him seated on a pony that was as decorative as himself. Ted recognized him at once for the medicine-man of some Indian tribe.

CHAPTER VII

MAKING THE BIG MEDICINE.

The Indian leaped from his pony and proceeded to unbind Ted, the wild horse standing quivering, apparently with fear.

When Ted was on the ground once more he turned to thank the Indian, who was standing beside the wild horse.

He was waving his arms and chanting a weird song.

When he had finished he bound some of the feathers from his own hair into the mane and tail of the horse, and gave it a slap on the rump. It immediately galloped toward the west.

Ted did not understand this ceremony, but he instantly recognized the control over the beast exereised by the Indian.

"Heap big medicine horse," said the Indian, looking after the departing animal. "Belong my people."

"Who are your people?" asked Ted.

"The Quaimals," answered the Indian proudly.

"You know the horse?"

"Yes. I make medicine to bring him here. He come. I send him to village."

"You my brother," said Ted, extending his hand.

The Indian took it and placed it over his heart, and Ted followed his example. That finished the ceremony.

"My name Antonito. My father big medicine-man. I go to agency school. He die. I take his place."

"My name Ted Strong."

The Indian nodded his head. "How you find horse? He stolen from my people by white men six moons ago," he said.

Ted briefly described his meeting with Fernando, and what subsequently happened.

"Ah! I know this Fernando," said Antonito. "I hate him. He been cruel to my people. He steal horses and cattle, he and his men. We all hate him. Some day he come to the end."

"Do you know Captain Foraker in the San Simon Valley?" asked Ted.

"Sure I do. He good man. Heap good to Quaimal when the big hunger come. He give us beef and meal. He good, all like the good Indian, work, no make fight."

"Fernando has taken his valley from him, and Captain Foraker send for me and my friends to help him. What you think?"

"Fernando bad man. Renegade Mexican. Heap thief. All his cattle stolen."

"A cattle-rustler, eh?" said Ted.

"That is what white man call the big thief what steals the beef. Indian know that all Fernando's herds stolen in Mexico, and in this country. Heap bad man."

Ted thanked his friend Antonito for this information, which he knew would be of the utmost aid to him later in sending the renegade Mexican to prison if he could ever catch him, of which he did not doubt his ability.

"But what am I going to do now?" said Ted, smiling.

He was in a bad position. He was separated from his comrades, who would have no way of knowing what had become of him, and would probably go on to the Foraker ranch expecting to find him there.

"You come with me to my people," said the Indian. "You heap welcome. I tell them how you brought us back the great medicine horse."

The young Indian helped Ted to the back of his pony, and, trudging by his side, led the way to the Quaimal village.

Ted knew better than to resent this evidence of hospitality on the part of Antonito.

Had he insisted upon the young Indian keeping his own seat on his pony's back Antonito would have been greatly offended, for such were the manners of the Indians.

They passed up the right bank of a river, and at last the Indian pointed across stream.

"The village is over there," he said.

The stream was a swollen torrent running swiftly, and Ted saw that it was too rapid and turbulent to swim.

"Antonito," he said, "you mount the pony and cross. You cannot swim it alone."

"No," answered the young Indian. "You my brother. You ride my pony, you eat my meat, you sleep in my blanket. You swim the pony. I follow."

Ted knew that argument would be useless against these

dian ideas of hospitality, and accordingly plunged the ny into the stream.

It was a swim of about thirty yards, and if the stream had been at a normal flood would have been not a difficult task.

But night was coming on, and the river was a dangerous proposition at best.

Antonito plunged into the stream beside him.

The pony breasted the current bravely, but it was stronger than he, and was carrying him rapidly down stream.

Ted knew, however, that he would probably come out safely somewhere below, and was not concerned for himself.

But he observed with some alarm that Antonito, his Indian brother, to whom he was pledged by the hand on the heart, was not making as good progress as he should.

Antonito was in a bad current, which was rapidly drifting him into a whirlpool, in the center of which as an ugly looking pile of jagged rocks around which ne water was swirling with fury. If Antonito did not escape this current his chances for coming out of the river alive were exceedingly small.

It took but an instant for Ted to realize the perilous situation of his new-found friend, who had but a short time ago saved him from a death that would be more orrible than drowning in this turbid Western stream.

Ted always made up his mind to the proper solution of a problem on the instant, trusting to his experience and intuition, which was with him a wonderful gift.

As he saw the young Indian sweeping down-stream toard the barbed and jagged rocks, against which he ust be dashed if something did not save him, Ted rned the head of his pony.

He had now got into the current himself. But, from ne height of the pony's back he saw the way out of the dilemma better than Antonito could, who was swimming desperately with his nose just out of the water.

The weight of the pony carried it down-stream at a greater rate than it carried the swimming Indian.

Toward the right bank Ted saw that the water was running deeper and less rapidly than in the center of the stream in which they were.

If he could get to Antonito in time to grasp him and force the pony into the backwater all might be well.

But it was certain that if Antonito struck the rocks, with the current running at lightning speed, the life would be crushed out of him almost instantly.

Ted and the pony were rapidly gaining on the Indian.

Soon they came opposite him, and just as Antonito was about to go into the undercurrent, Ted grasped him by the band of his leather shirt, and, with almost superhuman effort, dragged him out of the water to the back of the pony.

At the same time he took off his hat, and, sweeping it against the head of the pony, caused it to swerve in its efforts, so that it struck into the backwater.

The moment they were in this Ted slipped from the back of the pony and swam by its side, at the same time holding his companion on the pony's back.

Ted succeeded in guiding the pony to the bank, up which it scrambled.

As they reached the bank they were all utterly exhausted, and it was several minutes before they could more than breathe heavily in an effort to recover.

Antonito gasped at last, and turned to Ted, who was watching him carefully for signs of recovery.

"Brother, you have saved my life," said the Indian. "You are doubly my brother now. When the time comes I will prove to you that a Quaimal is always grateful."

"But, brother, you saved me from the wild horse and the wolves," answered Ted. "And we are equal on that score."

"Aye, I did that with my Indian medicine," answered the Indian, "but you saved me at the risk of your own life, which is different."

"We'll say no more about it," said Ted.

At the request of the Indian he remounted the pony, and they continued on their way to the Indian village, Antonito running with his hand fastened in the pony's mane.

As they neared the village they observed a great commotion among the Indians.

The missing medicine horse had returned to them with some of Antonito's feathers on it, and they regarded this as a "good medicine" sign.

When Ted and Antonito entered the camp and the medicine-man told them how he had brought the horse to him by making medicine, and how he had found Ted tied to its back pursued by wolves, they were greatly impressed.

But when, continuing, he told them how near he was to death himself, and how Ted had saved him from being dashed upon the rocks and drowned, they pressed around our hero and shook his hand, and insisted upon the chief making Ted a member of the tribe.

This was an honorary position, of course, and Ted was not unused to it, as he was already a member of tribes of Indians to whom he had done favors in the past.

The ceremony by which this was accomplished consisted of several functions.

Ted was seated in the center of a huge circle of braves or warriors, with the chief in the principal place, and Antonito on his right.

Outside the circle stood the youths of the tribe who had not yet won a scalp, and the women and maidens.

The women were beating the tom-toms and swinging the rattles, made of dried gourds peculiar to the country, in which the seeds made as much noise as an

old-fashioned watchman's rattle when they were rapidly agitated.

At the same time the old women sang a sad sort of chant, and the maidens performed a slow and graceful dance about the seated circle.

The young men, who had not attained to the dignity of being braves, were not allowed to take part in the ceremony, and stood looking enviously at those who were seated in the circle, some of whom were no older than many of their own number, but who had been fortunate enough to accomplish a deed of daring which entitled them to be ranked with the men.

The chief, a fine, stalwart specimen of manhood, who was dressed in loose trousers made from the skin of some animal, and a brightly colored shirt of cotton over which was thrown a woolen blanket woven by the women of the tribe, had lighted the ceremonial pipe in which was the native tobacco, very mild and fragrant.

After he had taken a long pull at it and expelled the smoke in the direction of Ted, he handed the pipe to Antonito, who followed his example and passed the pipe on.

So it went around the circle of warriors, and each blew the whiff of smoke at Ted. Had he failed to do so it would have shown that he did not favor Ted as a member of the tribe, and he would have been compelled to leave the circle, and afterward answer to the person who had proposed Ted for membership.

But not a member dissented, and when the pipe reached the chief again he refilled it with tobacco, and, lighting it, took several pulls at it, and arose and carried it to Ted.

Ted did not smoke as a usual thing, but he could not refuse to take two or three whiffs before returning the pipe to the chief.

The ceremony so far was not unlike that which he had gone through when he was made a member of the Sioux and the Blackfeet tribes in the far North. It was different only in small essentials.

But now the chief and Antonito arose.

Antonito entered the circle and sat on the ground beside Ted to translate to him the speech on which the chief now started.

It was a very flowery effort, praising Ted highly for his supposed achievements in battle and the chase.

Of course, the chief knew nothing of what Ted had really done in the West, but this was customary, and Ted had to blush when Antonito repeated to him what the chief was saying.

"He has given you the name of Tus-no-to-wa, which means the white brother," said Antonito.

When the speech was finished Ted arose and replied briefly, thanking the tribe for accepting him as a brother, and assuring it that he appreciated the honor, and would never bring disgrace upon it by any act.

Antonito translated it as he went along, and when Ted sat down other warriors sprang to their feet and made short speeches.

Then the drums began again, and a livelier song was taken up by all the women, and the warriors sprang up and began to dance around Ted.

It was a regular war-dance, showing that Ted had been made a full-fledged warrior.

After this came a dance typifying the chase. This was known as the bear-dance, and all the warriors went through the pantomime of meeting, fighting, and killing a bear, after which the women acted the motions of skinning and cutting up the animal.

This dance proclaimed Ted a mighty hunter.

After more singing the ceremony ended by every one rushing up to Ted and shaking him by the hand.

Thus was Tus-no-to-wa taken into the tribe of the Quaimals.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A SAND BLIZZARD.

Ted remained all night in the Indian village, and was treated as well as he would have been had he been visiting at any ranch-house in the country.

He was given the choicest morsels from the sheep that was shot and cooked for his benefit, and the softest and thickest pile of skins for his bed.

When he woke in the morning he and Antonito saddled a pair of ponies and galloped off to the river, where they took a plunge in the cool water.

On their return to camp they found that the maidens had cooked for them what remained of the sheep, and after breakfast Ted borrowed a pony and saddle from Antonito, and started for the San Simon Valley again, resolving to be more cautious this time about falling into the hands of Fernando.

The Indians bade him good-by with real regret.

They were a peaceful tribe, and were grateful to Ted for saving the life of their medicine-man, and at the same time they regarded him as a real brother, and one of them.

Ted knew, in a general way, the direction in which the San Simon Valley lay, but Antonito rode out with him a way, and pointed out the shortest route, which, he said, lay to the southeast, across the mesa on which the Quaimal village was situated.

As they parted Antonito handed Ted a package of the cooked meat, and a leather bottle filled with water from the village spring.

Then they shook hands, and parted with sincere regret on both sides.

"I shall make medicine for you, my brother," said the Indian. "And if you are in trouble and you need me I will know it and come. We shall meet again."

"That is my wish," answered Ted. "You have been good to me; no blood brother could have been better."

So they parted, and when Ted came to the first hill top he looked back.

Antonito sat upon his pony erect and as motionless as a statue, with his feathered topknot waving the breeze.

As Ted swung his hand in a last farewell the Indian threw something into the air. It looked like a puff of smoke to Ted, but it was a handful of ashes from the sacred medicine fire of his tent.

This was good medicine, to speed Ted on his way and carry him safely through to the end.

At first the weather was fine as Ted rode along, and the constantly changing panorama of the beautiful mesa kept him interested.

He calculated that by following the path described by Antonito he should arrive at the Foraker ranch some time during the night.

He did not want to crowd his pony too hard, and determined to let it take its own time.

It was noon when he came to the edge of the mesa, and before him lay the sand-hills of which Antonito had warned him.

They were not ordinarily dangerous or hard to cross, and, although the going was heavier for the pony than had been the hard earth of the mesa, Ted let the willing little animal pick his way and take his time, for he was too good a saddle man to crowd an animal in the sand.

He knew that the desert before him contained neither water course, spring, ranch, or habitation.

But he had crossed the desert often in the past, and he was provisioned against hunger and thirst through the thoughtfulness of Antonito.

Just before entering upon the desert he had passed a spring and had given the pony a chance to take one long, big drink of water, while he had also satisfied his own thirst.

Ted was used to going without food or water for long periods at a time, when it became necessary, and he was constituted to endure severe hardships, so that while the prospect of the long pull before him through the heavy sand might have daunted another, Ted plunged into it with his usual bravery.

For some distance on his way he found a well-defined track. It was a freighters' road to the mines, and Antonito had told him that when he found it to follow it for several miles, and then strike into the east.

He was still in this dim road, which, evidently, had not been used for a long while, when he noticed that the vultures that usually soar high above plain or desert, were flying low, and were passing him, and that all the small desert animals were active and moving, when, as a general rule, they are dormant during the heat of the day.

The weather had turned very hot, and the sun was beating down fiercely, so that the going was getting heavier and heavier for the pony every minute, and the poor beast seemed to be suffering.

As a result, Ted pulled it in to a slow walk, and finally got off it and walked by its side.

He knew that it was suffering from the heat, and the want of water.

He was wondering at the apparent flight of birds and animals when he looked into the west.

Thick clouds were coming up with amazing rapidity, and soon the sun dipped below them and the day grew suddenly dark.

With the disappearance of the sun the air grew chill, so that involuntarily he shuddered.

The pony, which had been sweating freely on account of the heat and its exertions, shivered as with a chill and stopped in its tracks.

"What does it all mean?" Ted asked himself. "I have never seen anything like this on the Arizona desert."

Afar he heard a sort of howling roar as of a steamer's whistle.

He looked in the direction from which this sound came, but saw nothing but the dark tumbling clouds on the horizon, for the sky above was only a trifle hazy.

Although it was only three o'clock it grew darker and darker, until he could hardly see his pony by his side, while it had grown so chilly that he was suffering from it.

He concluded that he would be safer on the back of his pony, for he knew that he would be in a bad position if he were left in the desert without a mount.

He had been walking beside the pony without his hand on the rein, and as he reached out for it now the pony, through some perversity, began to sidle away, and, as Ted still pursued, it quietly started on a slow trot away from him.

It eluded Ted in a seeming spirit of mischief, kicking up its heels and keeping just out of his way until he got exasperated and made a dash for it.

His hand all but touched the bridle when, with a wild snort, it galloped off, and Ted was left alone on the desert.

He did not even have the water-bottle and the food, which he had placed in a pocket in the saddle.

As it grew darker he began to realize the cause of the disturbance in the atmosphere. A "norther" was blowing up.

In the Southwest there is nothing a cowman dreads more than a norther.

This is cold wind, usually out of the northwest, but often it is caught as it comes from the north by the heavier west trade winds and appears to come out of the west.

It always brings a great drop in the temperature,

and in Arizona and Texas a norther will often cause the death of cattle, which have withstood the severe heat of the day, by the sudden change.

A norther is an unpleasant thing in itself on the prairie, but Ted foresaw another danger, alone and on foot in the desert, as he was.

Only a few minutes passed when he saw the sand begin to move, as if some great and invisible hand was pushing it along.

So far there was not a breath of wind, and there was something inexpressibly uncanny to see the great sand-drifts moving along in the distance, like waves on the surface of a lake.

This only lasted for a moment or two, however, when the thing Ted dreaded came to pass.

He was in the midst of a sand blizzard so suddenly that he had hardly time to turn his back when it was upon him, the sand blowing in fierce gusts, cutting his neck almost like shot.

Ted had faced many a snow blizzard on the Dakota plains, and thought them fierce enough.

Although he stumbled on with his eyes closed, yet the sand entered them and stung them terribly.

All Ted could see then was his finish, but he was determined to keep going, and he drifted along before the storm.

The road was obliterated by this time, the wagon ruts being filled as with blowing snow.

Once off the road, it did not matter which way he went, so long as he kept before the wind, until the storm abated.

But even this did not bring him much hope, for he knew that these storms sometimes lasted for days at a time.

Finally, after stumbling on blindly for several hundred yards, he felt that he was climbing, and knew that he was ascending the side of one of the huge dunes or sand waves which were frequent over the surface of the desert.

He could not open his eyes to see where he was going, but soon he felt himself descending, and soon he stopped, for he could no longer feel the sweep of the wind or the sting of the sand.

He was in the trough between two huge sand waves, and was able at last to open his eyes.

As he looked upward he could see the sand passing like a mist of rain above his head, as it swept over the top of one dune to that of another.

The wind howled like a storm at sea, and the air in the trough of the dunes was as hot as that from the door of a furnace.

Down there it was breathless, and he soon discovered the reason. The wind passing overhead was pulling the air out of the trough, and the heat was rising in the vacuum from the sun-baked sand.

His condition now was no better than before, for, although he could open his eyes and see, he could hardly breathe, and his body seemed to be burning up.

Night was coming on also, adding danger to the plight he was in.

A night in a desert sand-storm was a thing to make the stoutest heart quail.

He hoped that the storm would subside with the rise of the moon.

He had frequently known a norther to blow itself out between sundown and moonrise, and he hoped that that would happen now.

Soon the heat and the absence of air became intolerable, and he climbed the rise of the dune ahead and once more was in the storm, with his back to the stinging sand, but able to breathe cool air.

Soon it was dark, and the storm showed no sign of abatement.

But Ted kept doggedly on. There was nothing else to do.

How long he walked, or how far, he did not know, but he felt another presence somewhere near him, and stumbled forward with his hands outstretched before him.

His feet struck something soft, and he fell, but, as he did so, his hand came in contact with something warm and hairy, and he knew in a moment that he had found his pony.

Passing his hand over it rapidly, he found his saddle and the skin water-bottle.

He was perishing of thirst, but he had kept the fact that his throat was parching, and that he was burning up within, out of his mind, using all the mental strength he possessed to keep from suffering.

But with the water-bottle in his hand hope revived.

He pressed the neck of it to his lips and took a long, refreshing draft, and hope instantly revived within him. He felt his way to the head of the pony.

The poor brute was suffering terribly, but its instinct had told it to lie down with its back to the storm and hold its nose close to the ground, where there was not so much disturbance.

It had made a hole for its head, and lay there comparatively free of the blowing sand.

Ted lifted its head and poured a liberal allowance of the water down its throat, and, with a sigh of content, it sank back.

Ted at once realized the advantage of this, and, lying to the lee of the pony, was once more comparatively comfortable.

The storm still swept on through the night, and the sand piled up against the side of the pony and over Ted like a snow-drift.

As the night wore on Ted dropped off to sleep.

He was startled out of his sleep by cries of horror.

He sat up and looked about. The storm had passed, and the sun was shining brightly.

At the cry the pony rose also, and Ted was quick enough to grasp its bridle this time.

Then he heard a laugh, and, rubbing the sand from his eyes, saw, not far away, Bud and Stella, and a short distance behind them Ben and Kit and the other boys coming up at a gallop.

"Jumpin' sand-hills, an' that's true this time fer shore, what you all doin' out yere sleepin' in ther sand when there's a good bed awaitin' yer yonder at ther ranch-house? We all bin worryin' erbout yer a whole lot, an' this mornin' before sunup we come out ter hunt yer, an' finds yer snoozin' buried in the sand like a peerayrie-dog. Explain yerself."

It did not take Ted long to tell them all his adventure with Fernando, and his meeting with Antonito, and his subsequent trouble in the sand blizzard.

"Well, drazzle my aunt's cats, yer ther most luckiest *hombre* what I know," was Bud's comment. "Any one else o' us coyotes would hev give up an' plumb perished in thet thar storm. I know what they be."

CHAPTER IX.

TED IN CHARGE.

They were not far from the Foraker ranch-house. It seemed that in the night Ted had wandered before the storm farther than he thought, and in the right direction.

He could not have hit it closer if he had had a guide.

He was in his saddle in a moment, and laughing and talking about his adventure as they rode to the ranch, and were met at the door by Captain Foraker, his wife and his beautiful daughter Bonito.

The boys, in leaving the Lost Spring Pass, had believed that Ted had preceded them.

They saw a lot of horsemen riding in the distance—Fernando and his men, with Ted across one of the horses—but thought them probably a band of Captain Foraker's cow-punchers.

When they got to the ranch and found that Ted was not there they were greatly worried.

But Bud told them that he would turn up safely, no matter what misadventure he might have fallen upon. They had to be satisfied with this, for they all pretended that Ted had merely gone on a scouting expedition and would be back before night.

When he did not come, and did not appear the following night, the boys held a consultation, and decided that it was time for them to go out on a still hunt for him.

Captain Foraker offered the services of his whole band of cowboys, but the young rough riders preferred to do the work themselves, and they also knew that it was better that the cow-punchers stay and guard the ranch-house.

Fernando was not to be trusted, and if he found out that the house was not protected he might make an attack.

Thus it was that before dawn the next morning Bud had all the boys out of their beds in the big bunk-house at the ranch, and told them to saddle their cayuses and get ready to start on the trail of Ted.

Stella, with her usual intuition, had got an inkling of the affair, and at the first call she appeared on the veranda, and when she saw what was going forward she had Calamity Jane saddled and was ready to join the expedition, and there was no protest.

It was pure good luck which guided the boys to where Ted, exhausted by his night's tramp through the sand blizzard, was still sleeping.

After these things had been understood there was a consultation by all hands as to the course they should pursue.

Captain Foraker said that he felt sure that he had a traitor in camp, and that one of his men was carrying news of the doings at the ranch to Fernando.

He did not know who it might be, but Fernando seemed to know as much about his business as he did himself.

After Ted had washed the sand off himself and had satisfied his hunger and thirst, which were great, he went among the men of the ranch to get acquainted with them.

He found that most of them were not worth their salt to Captain Foraker. They were careless with their work in looking after the cattle, and it was largely due to this, and the captain's own easy-going nature, that Fernando had been able to take the advantage he had in so many instances.

But Ted was not much of a hand at taking snap-shot judgments of men. He could judge quickly on other matters, but, unless he knew positively that a man was not honest, he always preferred to give him the benefit of the doubt, and wait until he had positive evidence of the man's crookedness.

There was no hurry in the matter, and Ted looked the ranch hands over carefully.

Several of them he would have staked all he was worth on as being honest and efficient, but he soon saw that there were others who were not above suspicion.

One of those who fell under his watchful eye was the foreman, a strange character, who had won the confidence of Captain Foraker by his assumption of a vast knowledge of the cattle-business, and his faithfulness to his employer's interests.

His name was Diaz, and he claimed to be half-Mexican and half-American. He would have passed for an American anywhere.

Diaz was a free-and-easy fellow with plenty to say, and a nice way of saying it. He had a ready laugh, and showed a fine set of teeth with his palaver.

It did not take Ted long to see through him.

From the moment the King of the Wild West set eyes on Diaz he was a marked man.

The half-breed knew this, and whenever Ted entered the bunk-house where the cow-punchers and most of the boys lived, he was always very pleasant to Ted, and very complimentary.

The first time he tried it Bud bristled up, and said in a bantering way:

"Say, podner, cut that sort o' thing out. Ted Strong don't need any jollyin' from you. He's done what he's done, an' he's ready ter do it ag'in. He don't need no soft soap ter slide through this yere world."

This was said after Ted had left the bunk-house, presumably to go back to his own quarters in the ranch-house.

The half-breed flushed up in an instant, and made a hostile motion toward his gun, but Bud had him covered instantly.

"Put it up, pard," he said coolly. "No half-blood greaser hez been born what kin git ther drop on me. I'm tellin' yer facts, an' yer might ez well ez not take it ez its meant, friendlylike. Yer cain't fool Ted Strong any more'n yer kin me."

Diaz dropped back on the seat from which he had half-risen, and grinned in a feeble sort of way.

"I've heard a lot about Ted Strong since I've been in this country," he said, in reply to Bud's challenge, "and I don't see why I should not express my admiration if I want to."

"I'll tell yer why now, Mister Diaz, Esquire," said Bud. "Because yer not on ther squar."

Diaz was on his feet like a flash.

Bud had put up his revolver, and, before he could get to it, he saw that he was covered.

"Eat those words," hissed Diaz.

"I plumb cain't; I lost all my teeth in ther late war," answered Bud, with a grin. "And, besides, they're too kard fer my gooms."

A laugh went up from the boys at this retort, and the enraged Diaz raised his revolver to fire.

But he did not make a hit. A light form bounded through the doorway and caught his arms, and the bullet, which had been intended for Bud, went through the ceiling.

"Johnny at ther rat-hole," shouted Bud. "I never knew it to fail, when somethin' hed ter be done quick thet little ole Teddy warn't thar with ther goods."

"See here, Diaz," said Ted, as he disarmed the disconcerted and conquered half-breed, "you're discharged from the ranch. In other words, you're fired."

"What right have you to discharge me?" asked Diaz, with a sneer.

"Every right in the world," answered Ted. "Captain Foraker has appointed me manager of the ranch."

Diaz stared at Ted for a moment, with a dropped jaw.

"I don't believe it," he said.

"You'd better believe it," said Ted. "Pick up your war-bag and vamose. Go down to the other end of the valley where you are drawing salary."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are a traitor to the best boss you ever had, and that you've hired out to the biggest thief in the cattle-rustling business. And right now I'm going to cull out the rest of your bunch. You get your kit and go, and you, and you, and you."

Ted pointed to half a dozen of the old hands on the ranch.

At the same moment that number of revolvers were drawn.

But the King of the Wild West was not slow, nor were the other members of the young rough riders.

"Put up your guns, boys," said Ted. "The bluff don't go. But you go. I'm on to you, and if you are not out of here in ten minutes you'll be sorry."

"I reckon we've got enough cans to go around," said Bud. "If we ain't, we shore got ernough ca'tridges."

The discharged cowboys stood up sullenly, and said they would not go until they were paid their back wages, which Ted handed them out of his own pocket.

"Now git!" was his laconic discharge, "and if any of you fires his gun within a mile of this ranch-house there'll be the biggest funeral this county ever saw, and a lot of thieving cow-punchers, who never did have any business on the ranch, will be buried out on the cow-lot. Git!"

The discharged men scowled at him for a moment, and then slunk to their bunks and packed their belongings in their bags, and picking up their saddles went out to the corral, where they saddled their ponies and rode away silently.

They had not gone far, however, when they turned and rode back toward the ranch-house, which was some distance from the bunk-house and to the left.

Ted had anticipated this move, and when they were at the corral, he hurried the boys to the ranch-house and stationed them for business.

From where they were concealed they could see the discharged cattle-rustlers ride silently up.

They were preparing to fire a volley through the ranch-house windows, and might have killed some of the inmates when Ted gave a short, sharp order.

A rattle of shots rang out, followed by the thunder of hoofs, and a frightened and demoralized bunch of traitors and thieves fled down the valley as if they were pursued by the devil himself.

"Say, Ted, when did ther capting appoint yer manager o' this yere ranch?" asked Bud, after the fleeing traitors were out of hearing.

"Can't you take a joke?" asked Ted, with a grin.

"Say, podner, yer still ther slickest what is. How did yer know that Diaz wuz not all right. I picked him fer a good feller myself."

"I just took a chance at it," answered Ted. "But I'll bet my pony Sultan that I'm right. And I'll bet my share in the Moon Valley Ranch that I made no mistake on the others."

"It's all right, we'll stick by yer decision, right er wrong."

After the excitement incident to chasing the old hands away had somewhat subsided the boys all turned in.

All except Ted, who decided to stay on watch for awhile. He feared a repetition of the attack by the gang, and he knew that he would be able to turn them away without keeping the other boys from their rest.

He had been given a room in the big ranch-house. It was situated on the first floor in front, and Bud had a bunk in the same room.

Ted sent Bud to bed with the information that as he as not particularly tired, having had a good night's est in the sand the night before, he would sit up at the vindow and watch the moon rise.

Bud knew, of course, that Ted was going to watch for the return of the discharged men, and went to bed with his trousers and cartridge-belt on.

Ted sat at the window for about an hour. He saw the moon come up over the mountains at the east end of the valley, and was beginning to think that he had been mistaken in the intent of the fellows whom he had driven away, when he heard a soft step on the veranda.

Ted had the ears of an Indian, and could hear a cat's tread in the night. His revolver was hanging on his finger, which rested on his knee.

He raised it to a level with the window, at the same time slipping to one side, behind the curtains.

As he did so he saw a shadow slide along the veranda floor.

From its size and shape he knew that the solid part of it belonged to Diaz, and that he was creeping along in his stocking feet. Ted thought him a fool to wait until the moonlight would act as a detective against him, but he did not know that Diaz had only waited until he thought Ted would be asleep. He knew that Ted had been assigned the guest room, and that he probably would sleep with his window open. He had come for murder, and revenge.

Ted smiled to himself as he watched the figure of Diaz creeping closer. The half-breed slipped rapidly to the edge of the window, and paused to listen.

Bud was awake, and from his bunk had seen the whole play.

He was breathing deeply, as if some one was sleeping soundly.

So far the philosophy of Diaz was sound. Some one in the room was sleeping soundly. He did not know that Ted and Bud were bunkies.

Presently he peered cautiously around the edge of the window-sash, and saw a figure outlined in a bed, and heard the same deep breathing.

Ted knew that Bud was awake and that he was shamming, and his smile became broader. He knew that his partner would be on the floor in an instant, should danger call.

Of course he did not know how many men Diaz had behind him, or what his purpose might be. It might easily be the slaughter of the whole household.

As Ted was waiting thus, the body of Diaz was carefully projected around the edge of the window-casing, and he looked into the room boldly.

Then he started to climb in.

The upper half of his body was within, and he had one knee on the window-sill, when, suddenly, he felt a vise grip the back of his neck, and another vise clutch his wind, and he was dragged into the room with a swiftness that almost made him lose consciousness.

"Here, Bud, fix him," said Ted.

Bud was out of bed in a moment, and had gagged and tied Diaz, and threw him into a corner.

"Now for the next," whispererd Ted. The work with Diaz had been done so swiftly and expeditiously that not a sound could have been heard outside the room.

CHAPTER X.

STELLA AND BONITO IN THE TOILS.

In a moment another shadow came creeping along the veranda floor.

"Hist!" came from without.

"Hist!" answered Ted.

One of the other discharged cow-punchers appeared at the window and started to climb in.

He was seized from both sides, drawn into the room, and quickly bound and gagged.

One after the other the traitors made their appearance, and were as swiftly and deftly captured and placed in the corner.

"Any more at home like you?" asked Ted of Diaz, after he had removed the gag.

"Plenty," answered the renegade, "and they will get you yet."

"We'll take care of that, as we have taken care of you," said Ted. "If they are as easy as you, I should like to meet them. Your boss ought to raise your salary for the masterly manner in which you have conducted your campaign of murder, for that is what you intended. I have a picture of you languishing in jail."

"You'll never put me there," said Diaz. "Your tim is coming—and soon."

"Not yet, but soon, eh?" said Ted. "Well, you see,

from Missouri, you'll have to show me. In other words, I'm not going to worry about that part of it until it happens."

Ted called in two or three of the boys from the bunk-house to help guard the prisoners until morning.

The whole proceeding had gone forward so silently that none of the household had been disturbed.

In the morning, when Captain Foraker and his wife came down-stairs, they were very much surprised at the proceedings of the night.

Ted told the captain that he had discharged Diaz and the other men under the assumed authority of manager of the ranch.

"But you are the manager," said the captain. "That is what I intended to make you when you arrived, and I see that I was not wrong in my judgment this time," and he looked at his wife, and then at the sullen crowd of his former employees.

"Then it's all right?" asked Ted.

"Certainly," was the reply. "I turn the ranch over to you to manage unconditionally."

"Then we'll send these men where they will make no more trouble around here," said Ted.

Of course he did not make his intentions known to the fellows at that time, and, leaving Kit, Carl, Clay, and Bob Martin to guard the prisoners for awhile, they all went in to breakfast, where Ted announced his intention to send the lot to the jail in Tombstone as cattle-rustlers, under his authority as a deputy United States marshal, until he could secure sufficient evidence to send them to the penitentiary as cattle-thieves, which he was confident he could do without trouble.

The captain told him to do what he thought was right, and that he would not attempt to interfere.

After breakfast Ted ordered that the prisoners be fed, and then, under an escort of the young rough riders, led by Ben Tremont, the gang was sent to Tombstone, where they were safely lodged in jail. That ended Diaz and his band of traitors.

Ted was now determined to make active war on Fernando.

Stella and Bonito had by this time established a friendship that permitted them to walk about the ranch gardens with their arms about one another's waists exchanging confidences, and it was not long before they became chums.

Soon after breakfast they determined to have their ponies saddled and go for a dash down the valley.

Ted knew nothing about this, as he was looking over the home place in order to make himself familiar with his new duties as manager.

The girls went off to the east, where there were several herds of cattle grazing.

Stella was always eager to see the herds. They made her think of her old home in Texas, and Bonito pointed out to her her father's cattle, and told of the range as it was before the usurper came among them.

"There is a fine herd of cattle," said Stella, pointing down the valley to where a large bunch of smooth, glossy steers were grazing.

"I am not sure whether they are father's or Fernando's," said Bonito. "But I think that is father's bunch of two-year-olds. Let us ride toward them. I can tell whether or not they are ours by the men who are herding them."

The girls rode forward, and when they were close to the herd Bonito said:

"Yes, they are father's. That is Pedro, off to the left, guarding them."

The cattle were well bunched and feeding slowly forward, but on the other side of them Stella saw several men on horseback.

They were circling the bunch of cattle as if they were inspecting them.

Stella naturally thought that they were part of the Big Windmill Ranch outfit.

"That is certainly a fine bunch of beeves," she said to Bonito. "But why are there so many men with them? It should take only two or three men to guard a herd like that."

Bonito looked at the men, and then gave an exclamation of surprise and alarm.

"Great Heaven!" she cried. "That is Fernando and his men. But I know that these are my father's cattle, for I have seen him look them over and talk about them time and again. I wonder what Fernando is doing here? Fernando has never had the impudence to come this far up the valley before. He is encroaching farther and farther every day."

"Why don't you ask him?" asked Stella.

Bonito turned pale at the thought. She had grown to fear Fernando, and the fear had been instilled into her by the invasions of the Mexican upon her father's possessions, and her father's lethargy in bringing Fernando to task.

But Stella had no such fear. She had imbibed the spirit of the young rough riders to such an extent that she feared nothing.

Replying to Stella's question, Bonito said:

"I dare not. He is a dreadful man, and I am afraid of him."

"I am not," answered Stella sturdily. "If you wish, I shall ask him what he is doing in this part of the valley."

"If you are not afraid I am not," said Bonito. "We shall face him and ask him why he is trespassing on our ranch."

While they were speaking, Fernando and his men had been circling the bunch of cattle, and were now rapidly riding toward the two girls.

Fernando was surprised to see them sit quietly upon their ponies and await his coming. He had thought that they would flee at the sight of him.

As he rode up to them he saluted them with a sweep of his high-crowned, Mexican hat, and greeted them with a mocking smile.

"The señoritas are out early to-day," he said, in honeyed accents. "They have come out to see the Dos Cabezos Ranch, no?"

"No, señor. We are out viewing the ranch of Captain Foraker," said Stella spiritedly.

"Then the señoritas have come too far," was Fernando's reply. "They are now on my property, but they are more than welcome to it. I shall esteem it an honor if they will visit my poor house, which they can see at the end of the valley."

He was as polite, and his manner as polished, as if he were in a drawing-room, but there was a covert sneer behind his smile that filled the girls with alarm.

At first they did not comprehend the significance of his invitation, and Stella got angry at once.

"No, thank you," she said. "How dare you, who are the enemy of Captain Foraker, invite us to your house? You better take yourself back to your own place, or Ted Strong and the other boys soon will make you go."

Fernando stood looking at Stella with the same smile on his face. Finally, when she had ceased speaking, he laughed outright.

"The invitation was only a matter of form, my dear young lady," he said. "I have not the honor of your acquaintance, but I know the other señorita, and I have been waiting a long time for this meeting. It is most propitious. I shall have to ask you to accompany me. For you I do not care, but you may be of interest to some of my friends. But I have long sought the Señorita Bonito by honorable offer of marriage to her father, and herself. Both scorned me, and now I have her without the trouble of asking. There is a priest near here, and he is easily summoned. I suppose you understand me?"

Bonito was as white as paper and trembling like a leaf, and as Stella glanced at her and understood the significance of what Fernando was saying, she whipped out her revolver.

"You miserable greaser coward," she exclaimed, "do you think you can bluff me that easily?"

At the same moment her wrist was caught by one of Fernando's men, who had ridden up behind her and had caught her just as she was about to bring her weapon down.

Then, to her dismay, she discovered that while she had been parleying with the Mexican his men had surrounded both her and Bonito.

"We might as well be going," said Fernando, with another little smile. "It is but a short ride, and you will arrive there in time to take luncheon with me. You need not think to escape. You are too far from your friends to think of resuce, and had you voices like the thunder they would not be heard by any but ourselves."

Bonito looked at Stella with despair in her eyes.

Stella winked at her and whispered: "We might as well go peaceably. Do not fear. Ted Strong will find and liberate us very soon."

"I suppose we shall have to accept your invitation, señor," Stella said coolly to Fernando.

The Mexican had noticed the aside which had passed between Stella and Bonito, and was for a moment somewhat perturbed.

"No nonsense," he said. "You will find that I mean what I say."

Stella paid no attention to him, and he led the way, the girls following, surrounded by his men.

A brisk ride, during which Stella encouraged Bonito with the assurance that Ted would not be tardy in coming to their rescue, brought them to the big gray stone house at the end of the valley.

Fernando politely requested them to dismount, and assured them that their ponies would be well cared for, and by a gesture ordered two of his men to assist them.

Stella, who had twice the courage and resource of her companion, signaled her to obey, and the girls got out of their saddles and followed Fernando into the house, and the heavy door of oak clanged behind them.

Bonito felt that this was the end for her, but Stella did not feel at all despondent, for she was sure that Ted would come to their aid.

Fernando led them through a long hall, and, opening an iron door with a key, which was attached to a chain at his waist, conducted them down a stone stairway to a chamber beneath the house.

The room was well furnished, and was lighted and ventilated by a court that led to the roof. There was no other entrance to the room than by the door by which they had entered.

"Now, ladies," said Fernando, "you will stay here until we are ready for the priest and the ceremony." As he said this he bowed his way out.

Bonito burst into a storm of tears, but Stella smiled bravely, and putting her arm around her companion said:

"Do not fear. Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, will be here. He never failed friend nor feared foe yet."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE STONE HOUSE.

"Where are the girls?"

The King of the Wild West, having come back from his inspection of the ranch, asked this question as he stepped upon the veranda of the ranch-house.

No one could answer him.

They were not in the house, and none of the servants had seen them.

Something told Ted that the girls were in danger. It was that wonderful intuition, of which he was possessed. It had never failed him yet, and he relied upon it as much as he did his senses of sight, hearing, and smell.

When he came near the house, after inspecting the corral and other offices of the ranch, he felt that the girls, Stella and Bonito, were in danger. His exclamation as he stepped upon the veranda was the result of his unconscious reasoning that they had come to harm.

As a matter of fact, Ted knew the moment he entered the house that Stella was in danger, and a hasty search of the rooms was made by Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Foraker for the missing girls.

As soon as Ted knew that they were gone he called the boys together.

It was decided to go at once in search of the girls; but where?

Ben Tremont, and the others of the guard which had escorted Diaz and the other traitors to Tombstone, arrived at the ranch just as Ted ordered the boys to saddle, and they joined the expedition.

At the head of this force Ted rode down the valley, having assured Captain and Mrs. Foraker, who were well-nigh distracted with anxiety, that they would soon have their daughter home again.

But while Ted promised this he was not as sanguine as his talk would indicate.

He knew the strength and the ingenuity of Fernando.

Fernando had once served him a trick that in all his experience had not been equaled for devilish ingenuity.

Of course, he had no doubt but that Fernando was responsible for the disappearance of Stella and Bonito.

Working on this theory, he directed his force down the valley.

Coming upon the herd of steers which Stella and Bonito had stopped to examine, they found it guarded by a sleepy and taciturn Mexican vaquero.

"Have you seen two señoritas from the ranch pass this way?" asked Ted.

The vaquero looked at Ted for a moment, then produced a piece of brown paper from his pocket, and, with a pinch of tobacco, proceeded to roll a cigarette.

Ted watched him for a moment with patience, waiting for an answer.

The vaquero took his time before replying.

When he had rolled the cigarette and pointed it carefully with the tips of two fingers, he placed it in his mouth.

"Has the señor a match?" he asked, turning to Ted, with a lazy smile.

Ted reached over and grasped the Mexican by the collar of his embroidered jacket, and jerked him out of the saddle.

"A match, you scoundrel!" he cried. "You want a light for your cigarrito? Well, hold it up. I'll light it for you."

The vaquero held up his face with the cigarette in his mouth, and Ted fired his revolver so that the ball just touched the end of the paper and set it afire.

The Mexican took two or three puffs and set it going.

"Now, will you answer my question?" asked Ted.

"Si, señor," answered the vaquero. "What does the señor require?"

"You scoundrel, to whom do these cattle belong?" asked Ted.

"Until this morning they belonged to Captain Foraker. But only a few hours ago the grand señor from down the valley came and claimed them, and hired me to guard them, giving me *mucho dinaro,* and promising me much more for every month's work."

"Had Captain Foraker been paying you to watch this herd?"

"Si, señor, but the other man is so much more the strong, and has the valley taken."

Ted swept the cigarette from the fellow's mouth and jerked him into an attitude of attention.

"Listen to me," he said. "I am the manager of this ranch now, and this herd of cattle belong to Captain Foraker, as well as all the rest of the valley. I am the master, and what I say must be obeyed. I'll drift that herd toward the upper end of the valley, but first you will answer my questions. Have you seen the two señoritas pass this way?"

"Si, señor," answered the now trembling Mexican, for the summary manner in which he had been handled by Ted had brought him to his senses, and given him a vast respect for the King of the Wild West.

"Well, tell me about it," said Ted.

"I was guarding the herd when Don Fernando rode up accompanied by several of his men.

"'This is a fine herd of cattle,' said the don. 'We shall have to own this. Hereafter you are in my employ, and this is my herd!' And he poured many Mexican dollars into my hat.

"He had no sooner finished speaking when two señoritas rode up, and Don Fernando went to them and told them that they must be guests at his fine house at the other end of the valley. One of the señoritas made as if to kill the don with her revolver, but she was seized and disarmed, and they all rode away."

"And you did not go to Captain Foraker and tell him?"

"Why should I? Don Fernando is now my employer, and I am too busy watching his new herd."

"Isn't this the limit?" said Ted, turning to the boys. "What shall we do with him?"

"Can him," cried Ben. "We can look after this herd, and find the girls, too."

Ted ordered the Mexican to mount his pony, and get out of the valley.

"Vamose," he said, "and vamose pretty darned pronto. I'm sick of seeing such lobsters as you around here."

The Mexican climbed languidly to his saddle.

"Hurry!" cried Ted, who was now thoroughly exasperated.

Bud turned his six-shooter loose, and fired a couple of shots close to the greaser's heels, and then the whole bunch turned loose, firing all about the vaquero, around and above his head, but being careful not to hit him, until the fellow was crazy with fear and dug his spurs into the sides of his pony in his anxiety to get away.

He was headed out of the valley, and was never seen again.

"Here, Clay and Carl, take charge of this bunch of steers and drift them up the valley toward the Foraker ranch-house. We're going to begin right here to annex all the cattle we find."

They proceeded down the valley, meeting other herds on the way, some with and some without guards, and when they found that the guards were Fernando's men they drove them away and drifted the cattle toward the home ranch.

They were proceeding toward the Dos Cabezos ranch-house, and as they went they gave the long yell.

When they approached the house, Ted saw that it was apparently deserted, but he was as cautious as usual, and, holding the boys beyond pistol-range, went forward himself.

He went up to the big front door and tried it, but it was evidently impregnable, and he walked around the house and found all the doors fastened.

He had no doubt that the girls were within, but that the other inhabitants were away.

The windows of the rock house were so far above the ground that they could not be reached without the aid of a ladder, and all his efforts to force the doors were fruitless.

While he was thus examining the place, Bud rode up to him.

"Say, podner," said Bud, "what do yer reckon thet thar chimbleylike thing is up thar?"

He was pointing to the top of the shaft which led to the chamber in which the girls were imprisoned.

"I don't know," said Ted.

"I reckon maybe if we wuz ter git up ter thet we might git inter ther house," said Bud. "I see one o' them things on a house oncet in Omayhaw, an' it led down inter ther house. Do yer reckon if we got up thar we might git inter ther place an' examine it? It don't seem none likely thet we kin do it through ther windows er doors. Thet greaser hez shore built this yere house ter last."

Ted looked up at the roof of the house.

"That's an idea worth while, Bud," he said, at last. "That does look as if it was the top of a shaft, and if it is, we might be able to get into the house and find the girls; that is, if they are there."

"It's worth tryin'," said Bud.

"But the question is, how are we to get up there," said Ted. "By Jove, I believe I have it!"

Ted slowly unwound his lariat from the horn of his saddle.

"What yer goin' ter do?" asked Ted.

"See that chimney up there?" asked Ted.

"I shore do."

"Well, I'm going to rope it, and climb up there."

"Sho! Yer might ez well try ter rope ther moon."

"All right. Watch me."

It was all of a fifty-foot cast, and straight up into the air; not along the level, as most throws with a rope are cast.

"Yer cain't git a rope ter travel thet way, Ted," said Bud, after he had grasped the situation.

"I can make a good try," said Ted.

"Go ahead. If yer cain't do it, no one kin, an' if yer fail, I'll take a try, but I say it cain't be did."

Ted stepped back from the house, gathering his lariat in his left hand.

He eyed the chimney critically for a moment, then took the loop of the lariat in his right hand and swung it slowly above his head three times.

He had to bend back to make the throw, and it was an attempt at lassoing that Bud had never seen before, which made him skeptical as to its possibility.

But suddenly the loop left Ted's hand, impelled with terrific force, and, backed by his enormous strength and the accuracy of his eye, it went sailing in graceful curves up and up until it topped the roof.

Then the loop began to fall, and settled over the top of the chimney.

"Jumpin' sand-hills! thet thar wuz ther greatest cast I ever see," exclaimed Bud. "It's a plumb fifty-foot throw, er I'm a billy-goat."

"Now we'll go up," said Ted. "I'll go first, and you follow. If our surmise is right we'll soon be in the house, and if the girls are there we'll soon have them out."

"Go as far as yer like," answered Bud. "I'll foller yer plumb ter ther heatedest place what is if yer say ther word."

The other boys had ridden up when they saw Ted

throw the rope, and stood by to aid in whatever way they could.

Ted climbed the rope to the roof, hand over hand, with his feet walking up the wall.

As soon as he was on the roof, Bud followed him.

Together they walked to the opening of the court. It was as Bud had thought.

Bending over the opening, they looked down into the dark interior, from which came the sounds of sobs.

"Great gobs of grief! thar's some woman down thar, an' she's in trouble, fer shore," said Bud.

"Oo-hoo!" called Ted, down the opening. It was a cry which he and Stella used to greet each other with, and he heard an immediate response.

"Get that rope off the chimney," said Ted. "I'm going down. Stella's there, and I'll send her up. If Miss Foraker is there she'll come up, too. Do you think you can pull them up?"

"Surest thing yer know," said Bud.

It did not take long for them to throw the end of the lariat to the bottom of the shaft, and Ted went down rapidly.

As his feet touched the bottom, Stella gave a joyful laugh.

"I knew you'd come," she exclaimed. "What did I tell you, Bonito?"

Bonito Foraker smiled through her tears. She did not know Ted Strong, and the extent of his resourcefulness, as well as Stella did, and, therefore, had not her faith.

"Come, we must get you out of this before the return of Fernando, or we may never escape," said Ted. "You first, Stella."

Ted tied the rope around Stella's waist.

Looking upward, he saw Bud's head at the top of the shaft, and gave the signal, and the old cow-puncher began to haul away.

Stella went steadily upward, and was soon on the roof, and when the rope was lowered again Bonito followed her.

Then Ted climbed the rope, and soon they were all on the ground receiving the congratulations of the boys.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

The ponies the girls had been riding were found in the corral, and were soon saddled, and they were all soon on their way to the Big Windmill Ranch.

Big Ben Tremont and Bonito rode together far in the lead, and the other boys followed, racing with one another, and picking up stray herds of cattle and sending them toward the home ranch.

In the rear rode Ted and Stella.

She was telling Ted of her adventure with Fernando, and of his plot to marry Bonito out of hand.

"I believe he has gone after the priest now," said Stella, "which is the reason he was not at the house when you got there."

"There is a bunch of cattle off to the south," said Ted. "Suppose we ride over there and look at the brand. If they are mixed or have the windmill brand on them, we will drive them home."

"All right," said Stella, and they rode toward the herd.

In the meantime the boys had got well in advance of them, but this worried neither of them, for they believed that they were perfectly safe now that they had got away from the big stone house.

They rounded up the bunch of cattle with little difficulty, getting it compactly together, and were driving it slowly toward the upper valley.

It was a fine lot of steers, most of them with the windmill brand, which had been driven away from the home pasture by Fernando and his men.

They were so engrossed with their work and the flow of banter that passed between them that they did not observe that a band of horsemen were riding toward them out of the south from a pass in the hills.

The men were riding rapidly, nay, furiously, but Ted and Stella, engaged in their occupation, paid no heed to them.

Ted was showing Stella how to swing a herd of marching cattle into a trail, and they were shouting to one another across the herd, when Ted's keen ear caught the pitty-pitty of horses' feet on the turf.

He pulled in his pony, Sultan, which had been restive, for, with animal instinct, it had been aware of the approach of strange horses long since, and looked around.

Instantly he realized that Fernando and his men were returning.

Probably they had discovered that Stella and Bonito had been rescued from the house, and they could not mistake the sign that the cattle were being driven from the range.

When Ted saw the approach of Fernando he shouted a warning to Stella.

She was at the far side of the herd, and to get to him she had to ride around it, an effort that would take much time.

Ted rode to meet her, but this brought him nearer the approaching force of Fernando.

Stella saw the oncoming force, and knew from Ted's gestures that it was the enemy, and she rode with all the force there was in her pony to join him.

The rest of the young rough riders were too far in advance to be signaled to for aid.

It seemed impossible to escape from Fernando.

"Come, Stella, we must ride hard, or Fernando will get us," said Ted. "And if he does a second time, it will not be so easy for us to get away."

Stella reached his side, and they were riding together.

But they were not quick enough, for when Stella had ridden around the herd and Ted had waited for her, Fernando and his men had come within pistol-shot.

Fernando's men were yelling like Comanches, and Fernando himself, who was in the lead, was calling to Ted to stop and surrender.

Ted unloosed his revolver from his holster, but did not draw it.

He and Stella were now galloping steadily forward side by side, but Stella's pony could not keep up the pace set by Sultan.

Had Ted been by himself, he could have run away from Fernando's force with ease with Sultan beneath him.

Occasionally both of them looked over their shoulders at the approaching gang, which was getting nearer every instant.

Stella realized that it was the poor performance of her pony that was causing the pursuers to gain on them.

"Leave me, Ted," she cried. "They will kill you if they get you, and you can escape on Sultan, which can outrun any of their horses."

Ted looked at her and laughed.

"I guess not," he called back. "Keep it up, we'll win yet."

But all the while the Fernando gang was gaining on them, and Ted knew that long before they could reach the Foraker ranch they would be captured or killed.

If only he had not let the boys ride in advance of him he would be all right now.

It was only a moment later when there was a pistol-shot from behind.

It went wild, and only served to increase their speed.

But Stella's pony was lagging sadly, and it was only the question of a few minutes when it would give out entirely.

Both Ted and Stella realized this.

Then came another shot.

Ted sagged in the saddle.

Stella gave one glance in his direction and saw that he had been struck. How badly he had been wounded she did not know.

He was reeling now in the saddle, and she saw that he was clinging to the horn of it, as if he was too weak to hold his seat.

For so experienced a rider as Ted, this was an ominous sign.

Ted, who could ride the worst broncho that ever bucked a saddle off its back, to almost lose his seat was something so unreal that Stella knew that he must be hard hit.

Her heart almost stopped beating for a moment, as she tried to think what to do.

She was in the saddle now, and it was for her to act. Ted had shown his nerve by sticking to his when many a man would have gone to the ground.

With a swift motion she guided her pony, flagging and flaccid as it was, to the side of the superb Sultan, who was restraining himself to keep pace with her own beast, and reached out and caught Sultan by the bridle, at the same time calling to him persuasively.

"Stop, Sultan," she cried. "Your master is in danger."

Ted looked at her with a white and pathetic face, then closed his eyes and almost fell from the saddle.

Behind them came the demoniac yells of Fernando's men, who saw the trend of events. They believed they had Ted Strong, whom they had, of course, recognized as their victim of the wild-horse episode, and who had, by some miraculous means, escaped to come back and rescue their captives.

At Stella's cry the black stallion slowed his pace.

Stella talked to him again, and at last the animal seemed to understand, and by gently pressing on the bridle with one hand, while she curbed her own pony with the other, she brought them to a standstill.

Ted was evidently weakening fast, and about to fall from his horse's back.

Stella leaped from her pony's back, and as Ted reeled and was about to fall, she sprang into his saddle, caught him, and dashed away to safety.

The splendid Sultan, despite his double load, when he felt the free rein, fled up the valley at terrific speed, and arrived at the Foraker ranch-house just as the boys were unsaddling at the corral.

Ted was lifted down and carried into the house.

The bullet which had disabled had creased his scalp, and stunned him. But with the most remarkable fortitude he had been able to hold his seat until Stella had accomplished the change of mounts and saved him.

Under the ministrations of the ladies of the household, Ted was soon himself again.

A night's rest put him in as good form as ever, although his head was in a bandage on account of the clip he had got from the bullet.

The next day the young rough riders, augmented by the cowboys at the ranch, made an attack on the lower end of the valley.

Their approach was seen long before they reached the big stone house.

Fernando knew that this was do or die, and he rode out at the head of his hired bullies to fight the forces of the young rough riders under Ted Strong, who had right on their side.

Before the two forces had time to come together, Ted saw, much to his surprise, that the men of Fernando were beginning to desert.

First one rode away, and Fernando appeared to be calling to him to return.

There was the faint crack of a revolver heard, and

the deserter dropped from the saddle. After that the desertions were frequent, and when Ted dashed up to Fernando there were only a few left. The others were fleeing across the valley toward the hills and more congenial employment.

Fernando stopped his horse and took deliberate aim at Ted, with the intention of murdering him, as the King of the Wild West galloped toward him, and he might have been killed had not Bud winged him by putting a bullet into his pistol arm.

Seeing their leader wounded and disarmed, the other hirelings deserted in a body, and left Fernando sitting in his saddle.

As Ted rode toward him, Fernando threw up his hands.

"You win," he cried. "Don't shoot!"

"Don't worry," answered Ted. "I've too much nerve to shoot a man when he's all in, but I'll have to take charge of you, and I think if I were you I'd sooner be shot than go through what is coming to you."

But Fernando preferred the penitentiary, where he went for several years.

San Simon Valley was restored to Captain Foraker, and the herds of stolen cattle were separated by Ted and the boys and returned to the men who owned the several brands. But subsequently nearly every one of the cattle-rustlers who had been associated with Fernando were caught through one telling upon the other, and served well-deserved sentences in prison.

As for Bill Blue and The Phantom Mine, Ted was to know more of them, and in a most remarkable manner, as you shall see later.

Nimrod, the hunting cat, went back to Moon Valley, and always remained the partner and pet of Bud Morgan, who proved in many ways that this splendid feline whom he had saved, and who in turn had saved him, was possessed of not only great intelligence, but remarkable fidelity.

THE END.

In the next issue of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, No. 124, will appear a thrilling story entitled "King of the Wild West's Helping Hand; or, Stella, the Girl Range-Rider."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

WE receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

MEDAL LIBRARY

No.
150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.

MEDAL LIBRARY

No.
271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.
292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.
296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.
304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.
328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.
352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.
359—Frank Merriwell's Confidence.
362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.
365—Frank Merriwell's Fun.

The Price of the Merriwell Books is Ten Cents per Copy. At all Newsdealers

A CHAT WITH YOU.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The deluge of letters of praise pouring into our editorial rooms has impelled us to open this department, where, from week to week, we may meet our multitude of enthusiastic young readers and answer various questions concerning sports afield. If you desire to know anything connected with outdoor life, hunting, fishing, fur-collecting, or cowboy life on the plains, ask freely, since on our staff we have editors who are thoroughly posted in all that pertains to healthy sport in the open. In many cases we may have to abbreviate letters; but it shall be our aim to print everything that we believe must prove of interest to the great body of readers. We shall also, when not requested otherwise, give the address as an evidence of good faith.

While not able to say that I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from number one up to date, I have at least read about two-thirds of them. I am now a regular subscriber. I think "King of the Wild West Gulch Diggings; or, Stella's Star Rôle," is about the best one I have ever read. I especially like Bud Morgan. But one thing I don't understand, in one place they call Bud a "man" and in another place a "boy," as on page 22, in 116, it says: "For a second or two both lads stared at each other." Please explain this to me. The last twenty numbers of the weekly are especially fine. In fact, they read like some of Stewart Edward White's stories. I would like to ask a few questions. Kindly answer them for me: 1. Are there any cowboys out West now? 2. A writer in the current issue of one of the magazines says that the leather pants worn by cowboys are not called by them "chaps," but that it is only a piece of fiction conjured up by the Eastern writers of Western literature. They fail, however, to state what the cowboys call them. Maybe they mean to say that the cowboys do not wear leather pants, or "chaps" at all. Please enlighten me on this question. 3. Does not the recoil from firing a .44 revolver severely strain the wrist of a person not used to it at first, or is my wrist weak? 4. Please give me some points on firing a revolver. 5. Please send me a list or catalogue of all your publications.
Frederick, Md. J. C. B.

1. Though there are cowboys out West, and always will be as long as there are cattle ranges, cowboys are not as numerous as they were a few years ago. This is owing to the fact that the day of vast ranges of almost interminable length in this country is on the wane, the reason being that those localities are fast becoming settled. New towns are constantly springing up, and the land is being divided into farms. For all this, though, the cattle-raising industry is very large, and requires thousands of cowboys to look after the herds. 2. All the cowboys we have seen wore a protection of leather on their legs, and referred to it by the designation "chaps." It is merely an abbreviation of the Spanish word *chaparejos*, meaning a kind of leather overalls, used by cowboys to protect their trousers from limbs of trees and brush while riding. 3. Yes; the recoil from a .44 Colt which is being used for the first time by one not in the habit of firing off a revolver is apt to strain the muscles of the wrist. But this lasts only a short time. 4. Constant practise is the only thing that makes a good revolver-shot. The men who are noted for their accuracy of aim with firearms never let a day pass without trying their skill. 5. We have mailed you a catalogue of our various publications. 6. Bud is referred to as a "man" occasionally because of his manly qualities.

I have read your book, the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. I read "The King of the Wild West's Haunt," and "Stella's Escape from Sacrifice," and think they are grand.

I have also read "Frank Merriwell's Aids," and "The Secret Order of Scalp-lifters." They are the best books I have read.

I have told some of the boys around my place, and some of them have bought them. Victor Lund and Olof Mell have read them, and think they are the best books a person can read.
DANIEL JOHNSON.
R. F. D. No. 1, Box 28, Rush Point, Minn.

Tell the rest of your friends what an interesting library the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is, so that they all can enjoy such exceptionally good stories.

Having read a number of ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES, I thought I would write and tell you how much I like them. I have read a good many weeklies treating of Western life, but I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY beats them all.

Ted Strong is a manly young fellow, and I never tire of reading his adventures.

Bud, Ben, Kit, and Clay are also good fellows.

I do not believe there is a better book printed about Western stories than the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. THOMAS FALES.
Honey Creek, Ia.

And still another satisfied reader. They are all satisfied, for that matter.

I can say that the last number of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY was a very good story, and I think that all of them are fine. I read every number of them. EBO LAMMERS.
Hastings, Neb.

Why don't you subscribe for a year, and have the current issues come directly to your house?

You can rest assured of my praise and highest recommendation when I say that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best I've read. None compares with it. GEORGE WAGNER.
194 Second Street, New York City.

There is no chance for comparison between the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY and other libraries, for it is away above the others.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY about three months, and think the stories are great. The many adventures were so interesting that I could not wait till the following week's issue came out, so I went down and got an old No. 101, and read it to amuse myself until the next one came in. I hardly know what to say, except that it is the finest weekly out.
WILLIAM P. ROBERSON.
1456 W. Second Street, Dayton, Ohio.

This is praise of the right kind, and shows that our young friend is able to judge what is really worth reading.

I am reading your books now, and I think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY contains the best stories of Western adventures that were ever written, and I don't think there is any other book half so good. WILLIE THORPE.
Vermejo Park P. O., New Mexico.

This Western reader knows what he is saying when he makes a statement like this.

I have been reading the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY since it first came out, and I think Ned Taylor is there with the goods when he writes those Western stories. I also think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best library published. CHAS. STEELMAN.
Galion, Ohio.

Every number of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY contains an interesting story.

I have been reading the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for over a month, and I think it contains the best stories written. Ted is the most daring fellow I ever heard of. I think he deserves his title, "King of the Wild West," and I hope he and his comrades will always win. Mr. Ned Taylor must be very intelligent to write such interesting stories. A. E. LAMBERT.
Box 539, Ukiah, Cal.

Mr. Taylor knows all about cowboy life, having lived on a ranch for a number of years, and is able to give his readers a true picture of life in the great West.

I am a constant reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and would like to ask some questions concerning cowboy life. First, Does the average cowboy carry weapons? Second, Does the Western miner carry weapons? ROY J. GORDON.
6934 Morgan Street, Chicago, Ill.

Cowboys, miners, and prospectors always go armed when away from the centers of civilization, and riding in dangerous localities.

I would like to have seen Stella slap the masher's face. I think Ted was cut out for a diver. LESLIE CLOUGH.
South Wales, N. Y.

Ted Strong can do anything possible for a human being to do.

I have read of Ted Strong, King of the Wild West. The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is one of the best weeklies published. I like it better than any other weekly. JOHN LAMPKIN.
P. O. Box 372, Arkadelphia, Ark.

You cannot help liking such a fine publication.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is one of the best novels I have ever read. It shows the manly spirit of the Western people. I want to thank you for furnishing the boys with something nice to read. JOHN BUTLER
Box 30, Camilla, Ga.

We accept your thanks with a great deal of pleasure.

I am going to ask you a question: Is there such a person as Bud Morgan? I think there is a certain person down about Pierce City who is "stringing me." If there is such a person by that name, will you please write me something about him?
Kansas City, Mo. CORA.

There is such a character as Bud Morgan, but he is in no way connected with the person referred to in Pierce City.

I have never seen any letters from our town, so I thought I would write. I think the last number is the best ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY I ever read. Stella had a narrow escape from the mountain-lion. I am glad Ted saved her. Roy Vernon did right to apologize to Miss Fosdick. JOHN H. MOORE.
Box 74, Friendly, W. Va.

Stella is a charming girl, and, as you say, Roy Vernon did right to apologize to her. If he hadn't, Ted would have fixed him!

I have read all kinds of Wild West stories, and I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best printed, or that ever will be printed. CHRIS BARTH.
Palace Hotel, Durango, Colo.

It would be difficult to improve the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY—it now contains such bright, interesting stories of life on the great plains.

I have been a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY since No. 94, and have also bought others at the same time, but the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY beats them all. I think Ted Strong is a model for anybody in the world, and Ned Taylor is the best author that ever wrote a story. I hope he lives long, and that Stella will become a member of the rough riders. I haven't got time to tell you all I think of the best weekly ever published in America, so I will close for this time, hoping that some time your weekly will be published every day. HARRY BENNETT.
432 Calcutta Street, East Liverpool, Ohio.

Write us again, telling the readers what else you like about the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY contains the best Western stories I ever read. I have read all sorts, but these are the best. FRED A. BURNS.
Hillsboro, Tex.

Our Texas friend certainly likes the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I think No. 98 of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is one of the best of them all, though they are all good.
The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best Western weekly published. They are very exciting. I hope you will keep right on publishing them, for I like them best of all weeklies published.
I think Ted has the right to be called King of the Wild West.
The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is all right, and don't you forget it.
No. Canton, Conn. JOHN W. BROWN.

Every word of which is true.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is a close second to the *Tip Top* as "king of weeklies." I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is a good book for boys to read. Where Stella boxed that young man was a lesson to him. RAYMOND STRAUSER.
Box 101, R. F. D. No. 1, Danville, Ill.

There are no better libraries than *Tip Top* and ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for a young man to read.

A ROUGH RIDER AT HOME.

My pa's a great rough rider,
He's one of Teddy's men,
And he fought before El Caney
In the trenches and the pen.
He came home sore and wounded,
And I wish you'd see him eat;
He's got an appetite, I guess,
It's pretty hard to beat.

It's eat, eat, eat,
And it's sleep, sleep, sleep,
For ma won't let us make a noise,
And so we creep and creep.
Oh, we bade him welcome home,
And we're glad he wasn't killed—
Gee! he's got an appetite
That never will be filled!

He says he caught the fever,
And he had the ague, too;
And he kind o' got the "homesicks,"
And waitin' made him blue.
But when he reached the station,
And we saw him from the gate,
We were the happiest family
You could find in all the State. DICK TUSKA.
1439 Haight Street, San Francisco, Cal.

This is the first verse sent from the Golden State since the earthquake.

I have read quite a number of your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES, and think that they are the best stories out.
Eustis, Me. MAURICE BRACKETT.

Continue to read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and you will always be entertained.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for a good while, and think it contains the best Western stories I have ever read. Ted is so brave and noble. FRED DALTON.
Rogers, Ark.

Our readers all say that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best.

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best paper ever published, and I have read lots of Western adventures. Ted Strong is the best of them all. ROBERT CASTLE.
Box 127, Averill Park, N. Y.

You know that these stories are better than most stories of the West.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from No. 10 to date. I think that the last is a fine one. I like stories about under the sea. I am sorry to know that Ben broke his leg again, and I hope it will soon be better. Wishing Ted and the rough riders a good time, I remain, ERNEST SHERRY.
232 Everett Avenue, Chelsea, Mass.

Ben's leg has healed, and he is in the saddle again with the rest of the boys.

I have been reading the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for a year, and I think it is the only book. It just simply cannot be beaten. I always will read them as long as I can get them, and I have read a good many of them already. Ted Strong is the hero of the Wild West. R. E. PARKER.
Custer City, Okla.

A letter from our new State.

THE ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

SSUED EVERY MONDAY. **HANDSOME COLORED COVER**

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